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HULSE HOUSE.

A Novel.

By the Author of "Anne Grey."

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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HULSE HOUSE.

CHAPTER I.

IT was the last day of the Crofton's visit at Digby Manor, and in the hope of avoiding any more conversations with Lord Englefield, Lucy declined joining the riding and driving party with the others. She was quietly reading in the library, after all the party, as she thought, had set off, when some one walked in.

And, as my sister Martha immediately exclaimed, "Of course, it was Lord Englefield!"

"And, indeed, brother," my sister added, "I shall think very ill of Lucy, if she can refuse this excellent young man, whose only incurable fault, according to your own statement, is that he is rich."

"Ah! then," said I, "that might be cured. He may become poor in the next few pages."

"Oh!" said Martha, in a subdued voice, "I would not wish to force Lucy's inclinations, if she really loves Mr. Berkeley. But go on, brother, and let us see what Lord Englefield is going to say. It is a pretty opportunity for him."

"Particularly," added Jane, "if Lucy is reading some sweet poetry or a touching novel."

I shook my head. "My dear Jane, she was reading neither the one nor the other, but a very clever, humorous work by a well-known author."

When Lucy saw Lord Englefield's figure appear at the door, she could have raved at her own folly in not having taken her book up stairs.

"I thought you were with the rest of the party," she said. She was determined he should know that she had not stayed there on purpose to see him.

"No," he said, "I excused myself. I did my duty yesterday."

"Is it quite decided that you leave to-morrow?" was his next remark, in a less steady voice than she wished to hear, as he sat down by her.

"Oh, yes! we have paid a long visit already." And then, as Lord Englefield was beginning to speak again, she made a desperate effort to break up the *tête-à-tête*, and said, "I came for a book which interested me the other day. I must carry it off before any one else secures it," and she rose to leave.

"May I not look at it first," said Lord Englefield, eagerly taking it out of her hand. "It has an interest for me, as everything has that concerns you," and his voice was tender, and he fixed his eyes upon her, whilst he detained the book which was her only excuse for getting away.

But she was now desperate; so, putting out her hand for it, she laughed, and said, "I must, if you please, run away with it at once." And she was gone before he had time to speak.

He was very unhappy; all those things on which he had formerly prided himself seemed valueless, useless as they were in winning for him the affection of such a woman as Lucy. Nor was Lucy of that hard, stoical nature which allowed her peacefully to contemplate the mortification she had caused. Valuing Lord Englefield's love as lightly as she might, she knew that there must be much pain at first in the discovery that it was unre-

turned. She hoped, at least, to spare him the annoyance of a refusal.

During the early part of the evening everything favoured her. Lord George was devoted to her amusement, and Mrs. Digby was clamorous for music, and she and the Ladies Longville played numberless duets together. It was bad enough to have Lord Englefield standing near, talking to no one, and fixing his eyes upon her. Still whatever those eyes might wish to tell, they did not oblige her to answer them ; and Lady Emily Longville stuck closely to her, when, at length, there was a division of the party, that would otherwise have left Lucy at the mercy of any straggler. Lord Englefield however, stood wavering near, and Lady Emily looked her prettiest, to bring him to the vacant chair at her side. Lord George Bolton took it instead ; but Lord Englefield came nearer, and began to talk, first to Lady Emily, and then to Lucy. It became a sociable quartett. Lord Englefield drew another chair by them, and sat down. Lord George seemed determined on talking apart with Lady Emily, and Lord Englefield as much determined on speaking to no one but Lucy. The two duets became more marked.

“ Was your book amusing ? ” Lord Englefield said, in a lower voice, to Lucy, when he saw that

Lord George was busy telling some excellent story to Lady Emily. "I envied it," he said quickly, "that, or anything, which has a power to interest you. You would not stay to hear what I wished to say. Will you not let me tell you now?"

Lucy was distressed. How could she stop him, without an absurd affectation of not understanding his meaning, or a rudeness of which she felt the cruelty! The fear that he should look upon her silence as encouragement, and the dread that Lord George and Lady Emily should overhear, added to her embarrassment.

"Lady Emily would like to know your opinion of that book," she said, in a louder voice; "for she was equally pleased with it."

Lord Englefield drew back in deep mortification, whilst Lady Emily, delighted to be appealed to, turned away from Lord George to go into raptures about the book, of which Lord Englefield knew and cared nothing, but that it had rested in Lucy's hands, and as such was precious to him. He got up and walked away; whilst Lucy congratulated herself on having spared him from a more explicit avowal. He surely would not stoop to a second rebuff. She was called on to play a duet with Lady Frances Longville, and when it was over

she seated herself behind the piano-forte, to listen to a song from Lady Emily. Mr. Digby was by her, and she did not dream of danger. But Lord Englefield was miserable enough to make him determine to risk anything for the sake of a full explanation. He came up to the piano-forte ostensibly to listen to the music; and Mr. Digby, who had been told by his wife that Lord Englefield was desperately in love with Miss Crofton, and who would have liked the *éclat* of his engagement being announced from Digby Manor, thought the most wise and civil thing he could do was to leave them together.

“Take my seat, Englefield,” he said, getting up, and walking away; “you like music, and you hear excellently in this corner.” And off he went, believing that Lucy must be thanking him in her heart for his kindness.

“Have I offended you, Miss Crofton?” Lord Englefield immediately began. “You will not let me address you for a moment without hurrying from me. But I must speak. You leave tomorrow; and whatever your feelings may be, I cannot conquer my own. I cannot let you go with my fate undecided.”

The music went on. Lord George Bolton was turning over the leaves for Lady Emily, and

talking to her meanwhile. There was time for Lucy to hear and to answer: she tried to be calm, and to speak with decision, so that Lord Englefield should not go away with any delusion as to her feelings.

"Do not say any more," she said, "it would give needless pain to us both!"

"I have been too hasty, perhaps," said Lord Englefield, trying to master his emotion. "Let me wait—let me hope!"

"No," said Lucy, "it would be wrong to let you do so. Time can make no difference."

"One word," he said, bending nearer to her, and speaking with more agitation; "forgive my asking it. Once answered—as I fear—and you will be free from my solicitations. Have I a favoured rival?"

Lucy hesitated one moment, but she saw his extreme agitation. "My affections are engaged," were her words. Lord Englefield said no more, but he took Lucy's hand, and pressed it to his heart; then turning away, he left her to conquer her agitation as best she might.

She was thankful when the music ceased, and the evening was at an end. Lord Englefield had left the room, and to her great relief she was saved from meeting him again, for, as there was

an early breakfast next day for the sportsmen of the party, Lord Englefield professed his eagerness for a day's sport, and before Lucy was down, he was walking along with his gun, pondering many more things than the pheasants and partridges dreamt of in their philosophy.

He was a vain man ; but he was sad and not angry. He felt that Lucy had behaved with the most dignified propriety. She had steadily and consistently discouraged him, and he could only blame his own love for what had happened.

But Lord Englefield's love for Lucy had been of use to his character ; and I name it to encourage all young ladies to be as good, as unaffected, and as dignified as Lucy Crofton, and all lovers to be careful that they fall in love with women who have equal claims with her on their esteem and respect.

When the Croftons left Digby Manor that morning, a little *coterie* of ladies were eager in speculations about Lord Englefield's proposal, or non-proposal.

“ Depend upon it we should have heard all about it from Mrs. Crofton if he had proposed ! ” said Lady Emily.

Just then Lord George Bolton, who had left

the shooting party earlier than the rest, came in. He was immediately applied to.

"Oh! Lord George, what do you say? Did Lord Englefield propose, or did he not?"

"Propose! of course he did!" said Lord George, laughing heartily.

Nothing could justify a laugh, if that did not.

"No, really! did he? When? and when is it to be, I wonder?" exclaimed the Ladies Longville and Mrs. Digby all at once.

"Never, I suppose," said Lord George, "as she refused him; but it is not right to tell, only you must have heard just as much as I did, Lady Emily."

"No, indeed, I did not; you made such a noise."

"Oh! then, you wished to hear?" exclaimed Lord George, laughing again. "Now, I would have given a great deal not to do so, but I could not help it. I never can when any love-making is going on. Englefield looks miserable this morning. However, he need not break his heart! There are plenty of other pretty women ready to fight for him."

"But what did you hear?" said Lady Emily, eagerly.

"Nay, nay," was the answer, "I have told too

much already ; it is not fair ; and it may be a mistake after all, you know."

"Extremely likely," they all exclaimed. "I don't much imagine Miss Crofton would be so foolish as to refuse him."

"Of course nothing could be so foolish," said Lord George, who thought he had behaved very shabbily to poor Englefield, as he would have said, in telling these gossiping women what he had heard. The love of fun had tempted him to speak of it, as he guessed how unpalatable the news would be to the two young ladies.

"Well! I hope she will be happy," they added, as a kind after-thought, "for she is a dear little thing."

Lord George looked at them, and laughed very merrily by way of assent.

CHAPTER II.

LUCY CROFTON was again in her home. She might have exchanged it for a very splendid one; she might just now have been an important personage; grand schemes of usefulness or of pleasure might have expanded under her auspices: she might have built cottages and schools for the poor, and given dinners and balls for the rich, if she had accepted her wealthy lover, with his rank, and his fifteen thousand a year, and his fine town and country houses. Not only tradesmen, but fine ladies and gentlemen would have sought her out, and discovered her merits; and now she sinks back into harmless insignificance, without the admiration she would have gained had she unworthily accepted a man she did not love.

But Lucy did not sigh because she was unthought of in the great Babylon of London; but as the months passed away and she heard no-

thing of George Berkeley, she tried in vain to teach herself the trick of forgetfulness, which is so easily learnt in that active, restless, pleasure-seeking mob of society.

During some months Hulse House remained almost as much of a prison as before, with this slight improvement, that Arthur Colville began to feel some pleasure in talking to Lucy; he came looking for sympathy and liking to find it.

It was again summer. It was one of those soft and balmy days in which all nature seems full of rejoicing, and all sounds to have music in them. As Lucy sat in the flower-garden she fancied she was reading, but her eye was oftener dwelling with pleasure on the beauties of light and shade, and the gentle blendings of colour caused by the brightness of the summer afternoon.

As her interest in Mr. Colville was as lively as ever, she was not sorry when Mrs. Walter came into the garden, bringing him with her. Mrs. Walter had some pleasant recollections of *tête-à-têtes* in a pretty flower-garden, with a blue sky overhead—even a recluse might fall in love under such favourable circumstances—and after her first civilities were over, she made some excuse for leaving Mr. Colville and Lucy alone.

But the interest at present was all on Lucy's

side. Mr. Colville, indeed, seemed conscious that it was a beautiful day, for he spoke of the strong effect the beauties of nature often had on the feelings, but then he added, half ironically, "You would no doubt think it foolish or wicked to show insensibility to them, and to live without the power of enjoyment. There is certainly a good deal of merit due to those who, like you, have been in sorrow, and have learnt to be happy again."

"Learnt to be happy again!" Lucy repeated, and she gave a little shudder: the words sounded almost like a taunt to her.

Mr. Colville looked at her as she spoke; he was touched by the evidence of pain betrayed in the tone of her voice, and his manner was softened as he said,

"We are but poor judges of the feelings of others. I fancied you were happy, because you seemed to me to be cheerful. Your cheerfulness, then, is merely an act of virtue—a duty—a conscientious effort?"

"I should not think of speaking of it in this way," said Lucy.

"I do not see any other way," said Mr. Colville, "if you really feel."

"I can hardly explain," said Lucy. "Perhaps

you will not understand me.....” she hesitated, for she was afraid of speaking injudiciously; but Mr. Colville evidently wished her to go on.

“ What then ?” he said, eagerly.

“ I was thinking,” said Lucy, blushing at her own boldness, “ of the higher motives for our conduct—of the highest! When you said you saw no other way—when you spoke of duty, and conscientious effort, it seemed as if you thought we were to be influenced by stern laws and by fear alone; while I thought of faith and love which makes duty pleasant even though it is difficult. The whole character of our motives seems altered, and softened, and raised when we are under the influence of such faith and love as I mean. It would be so terrible to live without them ! and with them we can be cheerful, and almost joyful, although we are sorrowful for many things that grieve us here : but this sorrow is so different! so unlike despair! —that despair of which you spoke to me,” she added, half timidly, scarcely knowing how far she might venture to remind him of his own words.

But he did not appear displeased; on the contrary, he seemed to like the earnestness of Lucy’s manner, although he soon began to speak almost querulously again, as he said,

“ Your light is no doubt a purer and a brighter light than mine. You will pity, or perhaps despise a person who is not enlightened by it; but you can hardly blame him for not seeing, when he is without light. To speak of hope or faith to a person whose soul is filled with despair, is as great a folly as to tell a blind person to see ! He can no more rejoice in hope than he can see !”

There was such an accent of despondency, as Mr. Colville said the last words, that, for the moment, it took away all inclination or power to reply; but Lucy roused herself, for she was unwilling that the conversation should stop.

“ I cannot imagine despair before the grave,” she said; “ unhappiness is a different thing. We can do without worldly happiness, if it is the will of God to take it from us: but the light we have as our guide shines as steadily on the unhappy as on the prosperous. I suppose I have not had so many or such great troubles and difficulties as others, although I have ungratefully thought them so at times ; but I know how great and trying even mine have appeared to me ; but this light seemed to lead me on, and to show me a home where despair *cannot* enter ; and how is it

possible to feel despair when we are assured of reaching such a home?"

" You speak of *assurance* of reaching this home. Despair allows of no such assurance," said Colville. " If you question my judgment, read what Cowper says. You will acknowledge him to have been a good and a holy-minded man ; and yet I know of no expression of despair more decided than that in his poem of the ' Cast-away.' "

" Yes," said Lucy, " but is it not allowed by every one that Cowper's was a delusion?"

" Delusion or not, it went with him to the grave," said Mr. Colville.

" And we trust that it ceased beyond it," said Lucy gently.

Mr. Colville was silent for a few minutes, and then Lucy was almost startled by the earnestness of his manner, as he exclaimed, " Who can tell—who can know? Happy they who believe as you do! Words cannot express how deeply I envy the possession of a faith such as yours!" But then, as if determined to check himself, he added, as he fell back into his habitual, quiet, cynical manner, " But this is foolish, unmeaning talk! Some minds are formed to rise again after sorrow, and others cannot do so. There is an atmosphere

surrounding them which hope cannot penetrate. In my own case, the sorrows which at first changed my views of life are, in themselves, almost forgotten; but these sorrows opened my eyes to things which were hidden before. The question is—Does my atmosphere, or yours, give the truer view of life? Mine exposes and lays bare many of the fallacies of youthful anticipation. I wish I could believe that all the hideous forms of pain and grief it first revealed to me, were mere imaginations, and that I might then rather trust in the reality of your light and angel-like illusions! However," he added, with a return of his harder and more sneering manner, "as the character of my mind is fixed, it is vain to attempt to change it, or to dream of being more happy than I am at present."

"You must, at any rate, forgive me for wishing that you may be mistaken," said Lucy, with such an earnest tone of kindness, that again Mr. Colville was softened.

Truth and sincerity were written on Lucy's countenance; in the calm, clear eye, that looked at him with such open friendliness, love was not concealed: there was certainly no motive but simple Christian charity to account for her interest in him. The sincerity and goodness of Lucy

shook the basis of Colville's misanthropy more than a hundred arguments would have done. If religion were usually mere hypocrisy or superstition, here, at least, was one exception. If one were true, might not others be so?

CHAPTER III.

THERE is no doubt a great satisfaction in living in an old manorial hall, which has looked calm and grand, under the summer's sun, for more than a century before our existence; but it is impossible to deny that the cares and troubles of life are apt to intrude as impertinently into these venerable houses, as into any modern one of red brick! Mrs. Berkeley was a proof of it, as she lay within the walls of the old manorial hall of the Berkeleys. If she had gained the point at which she had so unjustly laboured, she was not the less troubled and excited about worldly things, and she still suffered a great deal from nervous fears and anxieties. But in the neighbouring baronial hall, which was equally grand and venerable, the prospect was more cheerful.

The summer sun was now shining upon it, lighting up the hall, and the library, and the

chapel, and the ins-and-outs of the old house ; and if it told no secrets of the long past years, with which it was so well acquainted, it gave some insight into the dawning happiness of Margaret Raymond.

Margaret was sitting in the deep recess of one of the oriel windows, watching with pleasure the glow of the evening sun on the woods and turrets of Berkeley Manor, as they appeared in the distance, forming an agreeable boundary to the home view from Raymond Hall.

Margaret Raymond had many of the qualities which Mrs. Berkeley peculiarly prized for her future daughter-in-law. She was amiable, placid, and gentle, with great refinement of mind and manner ; and though not decidedly pretty, her expression was very pleasing, and she had remarkably intelligent, soft, dark eyes.

There was none of Margaret Raymond's calmness in the animated variable person who was her companion at this moment. Whenever there was repose, it was that of extreme sadness ; but it seemed as if the spirit within knew no rest, and as if the gay and sparkling nature constantly bubbled up, whatever cares or sorrows tried to depress it.

“ What curious accidents of interest there are

sometimes in the world," said Agnes Spencer, for she it was. "They blend so strangely one into another! The moment I saw Lucy Crofton, I knew that I should love her; and I laboured hard till I gained the prize of her friendship, which is not lightly given. You cannot imagine what rest and trust I feel in her love! She is so perfectly truthful, and safe, and good—so good, indeed!—that at first I felt almost awed by her goodness, little as she thought it! And now, Margaret, I have talked enough of my own interests, let me hear something of yours! When am I to wish you joy?"

"Oh, Agnes!" was the hasty, nervous reply, "you know what I said about his sadness. Indeed, it is foolish to think he will ever forget the past!"

"Do not vex me into being spiteful," said Agnes, gaily; "now, Margaret, partial as I am....."

But here she was interrupted, for George Berkeley walked in. He sat down by Margaret.

"I hope your mother is better?" she said, gently and anxiously.

"I can see no improvement," was the reply. "I wish I could persuade her to let me bring you, Margaret, for I am sure you would do her

good ; but she will not hear of seeing you, or any one."

And here the scene closes at the old Baronial Hall. There seems every probability that Mrs. Berkeley's wishes for her son will be fulfilled if her life is spared. George Berkeley's anxiety to unravel the mystery of Lucy's rejection had evidently faded away, or his mother's persuasive powers had been tried, and his affection for her, and his fears for her health and reason successfully combated his love for Lucy.

When the blue of the wild hyacinth had died away, and the bird's song was again hushed, and the autumn was come, Margaret Raymond was very happy in the joy of loving and being beloved.

" Ah ! but let Margaret Raymond be what she may, Mrs. Berkeley little knew what a daughter-in-law Lucy Crofton would have been to her !" said my sister Jane.

" But Mr. George Berkeley is not much to be regretted, I think," was the severe remark of my sister Martha. " He might have waited at least another year ! I only hope his conscience will smite him if he hears that Lucy has rejected that excellent young man, Lord Englefield, for his sake !"

"I doubt whether he will ever know it," said I. "But I must now return to the Parsonage."

Agnes Spencer was going to meet her father in the neighbourhood of London, and she was come to see Lucy for a few hours, as she passed by Hulse village on the road from the north.

With her usual determination to have her own way, after sitting for a short time impatiently enduring Mrs. Walter's civilities, she proposed to Lucy that they should adjourn to her room upstairs. They were soon seated there together. Agnes was nervous in manner, and evidently out of spirits.

"Did Mr. Colville lend you this book," she asked, as she looked at one Lucy had been reading.

"Yes," said Lucy. "We can talk of books together; but I wish he would open his heart to me on other subjects."

Agnes started—she laid down the book. "You wish he would open his heart to you?" she said, as if she had received a sudden chill. "Never fear! that will come in time; one common subject of interest will lead you on, and you will probably soon cure him of the unhappy misanthropy which all his friends must deeply deplore."

"We have indeed one common subject of interest," said Lucy; "but it is one which in many respects makes me very unhappy for him. But do not tempt me to speak of it, dear Agnes, for it is scarcely right to do so even to you," she said.

There was a sudden expression of pain on the face of Agnes, as she turned away for an instant, and looked out of the window.

"You have told me too much already to fear to tell me more," she said at length.

Lucy looked surprised. She was not aware of having told her anything, and this was the first day on which she had ever spoken unreservedly of her conversations with Mr. Colville, or alluded to her doubts as to his religious belief.

Agnes went on. "Tell me more, Lucy! Why not tell me all?"

"No," said Lucy, after a little consideration, "it would be unfair to him; but you cannot think how great, how *very* great, my interest is in him!" she said, warmly; "and I would give a great deal to be able to talk to you freely on the subject."

Agnes did not immediately answer; she turned suddenly pale, and her hand convulsively grasped hold of the chair on which it rested.

"Are you well, dear Agnes?" said Lucy, anxiously.

"Well!" exclaimed Agnes, while a sudden flush of colour spread over her face, and she spoke sharply and angrily, "Well! why should I not be well?"

Lucy was vexed at herself for having remarked upon her change of colour, when she saw how much it annoyed Agnes. She said, "I fancied you were pale—that was all!" Agnes was silent for a moment, and then she said,

"Your interest in Mr. Colville is then very great? I knew it; but I cannot see why it should cause unhappiness?"

"Perhaps," said Lucy, "*unhappiness* is too strong a term for any feelings of this kind."

"You and I, then, have a very different idea of such feelings!" said Agnes, with a sudden burst of her natural, vehement manner; but it subsided, and there was something strange and sarcastic in her tone as she added, "It is better to be less sensitive. I can assure you it saves much suffering!" and then she became more serious, and again asked Lucy to tell her something further about Mr. Colville.

Lucy did not feel justified in making Mr. Colville's unhappy state of mind a subject for conver-

sation; she therefore begged Agnes not to tempt her to speak of it again; and she turned to another topic. But it was useless. As if quite incapable of attending to anything else, Agnes gave a random answer. There was a silence, and then she said,

“ I have some right to hear more. You will, perhaps, be persuaded to speak openly to me, Lucy, when I tell you that I know Mr. Collville.”

Lucy looked up in uncontrollable amazement. “ You know him !” she exclaimed, “ you know him !” and then she was struck with something so strange in the manner of Agnes, so constrained and unnatural, that she was afraid of uttering the crowd of questions that rose to her lips on this extraordinary announcement; and before she had time to recover from her extreme surprise, Agnes had began to speak again, so gravely and deliberately, that it seemed as if she were determined not to be interrupted.

“ Now, will you tell me more ?” she said, “ or must I tell you ? From one who has known him well, you will rejoice to hear that in his character there is every virtue to claim respect, every grace and charm to win affection. The world, knowing but little of the unhappy circumstances that led

to his seclusion, may blame his conduct ; they may speak of his faults ! but I know of none ! and if it is true—as I cannot doubt—that from henceforth your happiness and his are linked together, such a testimony to his excellence from one who has long known him, will be sweet to your ears. Such praise is the least that is due from me to him.”

Thoughts and conjectures pass with such rapidity through the mind, and often in such a tangled unfinished way, that it would be impossible to note them down in words. This was the case with Lucy Crofton’s thought as Agnes Spencer spoke. A new and most extraordinary light had burst in upon her, before Agnes had uttered many words. Common surprise had been her first feeling; but conjecture after conjecture followed, and she soon became almost certain that Agnes was the person who had caused Mr. Colville’s unhappiness, and that he was the person Agnes had loved ; and that by some strange misconception Agnes supposed that he and Lucy were attached to one another.

But clearly as these ideas seemed at length to stand forth, the whole disclosure was so confusing, so new, so very strange, that Lucy was bewildered

by it, and she sat listening to Agnes, hardly knowing what further wonderful revelations were to follow. And Agnes still went on with great precision and forced calmness, as if she were getting through a task which must be completed, and with a manner and in a tone entirely different to her usual one.

"Though he may not yet have named me," she said, "the time may come when he will do so; and it is as well that you should have authority to state that I had distinctly expressed to you my wishes for your happiness together. I came here to-day on purpose to tell you this, for I felt it was needless to conceal the fact of our former acquaintance any longer. I did not venture to speak of it sooner, out of delicacy towards his feelings, but the time is past in which I need be scrupulous on this account! His happiness is safe with my best friend!" And Agnes tried to smile as she said this—it was a poor attempt. "You see that further reserve is quite unnecessary," she continued; "therefore, Lucy, tell me simply the fact—tell me chiefly whether you think that his melancholy is lessening under the influence of your affection—for here, I guess, is your difficulty and your distress. Tell me this, Lucy, and then I do not ask to force myself further into your

confidence; and you need not fear that I shall harass you with any more impertinent and intrusive questions. We shall part, but I shall think of you together with warm and friendly interest. My course in life may be separated from yours, but I am not so fickle as to cease to love you."

"Oh, Agnes! dearest Agnes!" exclaimed Lucy, "you are mistaken—quite mistaken! There is no attachment between Mr. Colville and myself—there never was—there never can be! I love another; and Mr. Colville never spoke a word of love to me: he never dreamt of it—never! never!" she said vehemently.

Agnes turned to her. During the whole time she herself had been speaking, her countenance had looked as if changed into the rigidity of stone; but now her eyes dilated; she looked at Lucy, as if for the instant she hardly could believe what she was saying; and then a flash of joy came over her face, her whole countenance was altered, it was radiant. "You love another," she exclaimed. "Arthur has not loved again!"

She could say no more. She could not utter the words of thankfulness and joy that were swelling at her heart—her excitement was too great! She clasped her hands together. She

tried once more to speak—but it was useless. She covered her face with her hands, and burst into tears. She wept as if her long-suppressed emotion could find no relief but in a flood of tears, almost alarming in its length and violence.

When at length she regained some degree of composure, and was able to speak, she told Lucy, in broken expressions, what I will relate in a more connected form, adding to it much that Agnes herself was unacquainted with.

Almost immediately after Agnes Spencer came out in London society, she and Arthur Colville became attached to one another. The announcement of their engagement was delayed by the death of both Mr. Colville's parents, within the short space of a few months; but in due course of time, after this calamity, Arthur Colville's intended marriage with Agnes was formally declared. Then came a period on which Agnes Spencer certainly might look back with the deepest shame and regret. She loved Arthur Colville with the full devotion of her warm enthusiastic character, but she tried his feelings and his forbearance by the most capricious conduct, merely for the silly purpose of testing his love! High-spirited and wilful—a thorough spoilt child—she determined to have such love, in return for her

own, as no woman ever won before: she would be loved, not only for her virtues, but for her very faults. On this plan she set herself to act; and it succeeded for a time—for Arthur Colville's love only increased through all the needless pain she inflicted upon him by her caprices.

But then came a sudden, a most calamitous, stop to Miss Spencer's triumphs; and to explain this, I must give some account of Arthur Colville's own history. I shall still call him by that name, as it is the one by which alone we know him as yet. His early youth had been one of great and unusual prosperity. He was the only child of rich parents, who almost idolized him; loving him not wisely, but too well. Every whim and wish was gratified; and the handsome, clever, agreeable youth was courted and flattered in the world just as much as at home. He had formed a strong friendship at Eton with an orphan youth, named Douglas Treeby. Douglas Treeby was poor, and had no near relations living. To gratify their son, Arthur Colville's parents adopted the boy. He and Arthur grew up together, with daily increasing devotion on Arthur's side for his winning, attractive friend. In London they were constant companions—as far as Treeby's study of the law would admit; and when Colville was

first captivated by Agnes Spencer, he confided his admiration to Douglas Treeby. As I said before, Colville's love was returned by Agnes and there were no obstacles to their engagement. So far in his life all had been prosperous.

Arthur Colville was joyous, open-hearted, and generous. His parents had taught him just their own degree of religion, which was a mere form—there were no deep principles instilled. They were amiable and moral; and their son's nature seemed so good, that the safeguards of religion were apparently scarcely needed by him.

Suddenly all was changed! First came Agnes Spencer's capricious conduct—at times almost maddening to her lover. Then death visited his home; and within a few months a fever carried off both his parents, whom he sincerely loved. And then came the really crushing blow! This was the discovery of the utter worthlessness of his friend, Douglas Treeby!

I need not enter into all the particulars of this history, but only tell what is necessary to account for Arthur Colville's subsequent conduct, and change of character. Douglas Treeby had for years been committing various frauds and forgeries, some of them affecting the interests of Arthur Colville, but some actually benefitting him.

First suspicions arose, and rumours affecting Treeby's character prevailed in the county. Arthur Colville met them with an indignant contradiction. He looked on the whole as a vile conspiracy against his innocent friend. With the generous, confiding enthusiasm of his character, he warmly defended his injured companion. Douglas Treeby knew how to work on the feelings of others; he had gained complete mastery over those of Colville: and before any of his misconduct had been discovered, he had been enacting another piece of treachery.

As I said before, Arthur had confided to him his love for Agnes Spencer. It so happened that Douglas Treeby was also captivated by her. He did not confess this; but he artfully tried to lower Colville in her estimation: and having, as he vainly hoped, succeeded, he ventured to declare to her his own love. Agnes scornfully rejected him; and, from a lover, she converted him into her most bitter enemy. After her engagement to Arthur was publicly announced, he tried to poison his friend's ear with false tales against Agnes; he pretended that she often spoke of him with ridicule to other men; he also said that she carried on a flirtation with a man of bad

character—whom, in truth, Agnes had dismissed with horror.

Colville was heart-stricken. Still he could not bear to separate himself from Agnes ! And then came a more absorbing calamity—Douglas Treeby was arrested for forgery ! Long before affairs had come to this climax, Arthur Colville's feelings had been often worked upon in numerous terrible scenes with his artful friend, as his nefarious practices brought him into difficulty.

Arthur Colville behaved in the most generous, unselfish way : bearing all the trouble, and expense, and suspicion, in which these delinquencies often involved him ; and as to all of which Douglas managed to persuade Arthur that some unhappy inadvertencies, or generous acts of self-sacrificing care for some unfortunate friend had been the cause—in short, one artifice after another was used, by which Colville was deceived. Arthur Colville was naturally impetuous, proud, and warm-tempered, and his defence of his friend, against what he conceived were the malicious aspersions of some of the county gentlemen, who envied him his good fortune and success in the world, drew on himself a good deal of anger and some obloquy.

At length a fresh fraud of Treeby's was disco-

vered. Most unconsciously, Arthur Colville had been for some months a sharer in the profit that Treeby had made by it, and when Treeby had to stand his trial for forgery, amongst other matters involved in his more glaring acts of dishonesty, this circumstance was brought to light. Arthur Colville saw himself branded as an accomplice in the successful fraud.

As the evidence proceeded step by step, proving more and more distinctly Douglas Treeby's criminality, Colville's eyes were opened, and the whole train of villainy unfurled itself before him. He could no longer doubt the truth of it. He was in court, proudly indignant at the trial to which his innocent friend (as he then supposed him to be) was subjected, and he was there ready to step forward as a witness to his integrity, if it were needed. What were his feelings as this friend was gradually proved to be more and more guilty, and more and more deceitful ! and at length his own character for honesty was impugned by his connection with one of these disgraceful transactions. Unluckily, the very circumstance which first entirely convinced him of the reality of Douglas Treeby's guilt, was the case in which his own character was involved. He had been sitting near a set of country gentle-

men, waiting till the moment would come when he could stand forth and openly vindicate his friend's character. The evidence became clearer and clearer; one or two startling facts were brought forward; conviction forced itself upon him—Douglas Treeby was a traitor! a dishonoured man! a swindler! a forger! Colville tried to look up; he tried to fancy he was in a dream. There was a buzz, a murmur in the gallery—he closed his eyes as though to shut out from his own heart the knowledge of what was passing, but as he reopened his eyes the whole dreadful truth flashed back upon him: he saw faces looking sternly at him, or with contemptuous pity in their expression. He saw, or fancied he saw, that his own integrity was doubted! but this was nothing—nothing to the other terrible certainty! He himself was innocent! nay, more, his conscience told him how many sacrifices he had made of his own pleasure and convenience, and pecuniary interests in regard to some of those very cases in which he might very reasonably stand suspected; but all this was nothing to him. The thought that overwhelmed him was this: the friend whom he had ardently loved and admired, and with whom he had shared every thought from boyhood, was dishonest—deceitful—a base villain—a forger!

At this very moment there was a demand from the counsel on Treeby's side that he should fulfil his intention of coming forward to testify to the excellence of the prisoner's character. What was he to do? Could there be extenuating circumstances? Arthur Colville saw none; he could not deceive himself in the belief that there were. He looked at Douglas Treeby; there was no shame evident on that beautiful winning face, and sweet apparently open countenance, and the soft blue eyes looked round at the court, shameless and untrue as ever!

Arthur Colville, scarcely knowing what he was doing, stood in the witness-box; he hesitated; his evidence to character only helped to strengthen the opinion of the jury against the prisoner, and to give some suspicion against Colville himself. The agony of shame, of wounded affection, of abused confidence, during that hour of torture, in which he first received the conviction of his friend's utter worthlessness and treachery, and then stood in the witness-box to see the contemptuous or pitying looks of the assemblage turned on himself as he stammered forth a few sentences, giving an apparent confirmation of the slur cast on his own character, at once and for ever altered Arthur Colville's nature!

Careless of life, embittered, agonised, avoiding the sight of every human being, he returned to his home. His only softening thought was of Agnes, and yet what misery there was even in this ! for his mind had been poisoned, as we said, with respect to her, and her own mad conduct helped to condemn her. Would Agnes credit the imputation on his own honesty, as he fancied with angry pride that some of his quondam friends had done ? She would soon hear of what had passed : he would wait—he would not write to her till she had time to hear what his greatest enemies could say.

At last there was a letter from Agnes. It was one of those chances which sometimes in our lives occur to perplex all our speculations as to *why* they should be permitted. Her letter was short and cold. She had *not* heard of the trial, or of the seeming imputation on her lover's integrity ; had she done so, no doubt, with her warm generous nature, she would have written, with a full heart, to offer comfort, and to express her indignant denial of any suspicion against his honour. As it was, she was merely indignant at his neglect in not writing sooner. Her wilful vanity was more severely punished than it seemed to deserve !

Colville received her letter as a proof that she believed the imputation against him, and that she meant to show him her wish to break off her engagement to a dishonoured man. He wrote, coldly and harshly, telling her he absolved her from every tie to himself, and he said not one word of his reasons for doing so.

Meantime the trial had closed. The judge, in summing up, had glanced at the imputation against Mr. Colville, merely to speak of it as utterly unfounded, and not a doubt of his complicity with Treeby's guilt rested on the minds of any of the country gentlemen and magistrates. He received one or two very kind notes. Knowing Colville's extreme friendship for the unhappy criminal, who was now convicted of forgery, and sentenced to transportation for life, they touched as delicately as they could on the subject, but many wrote purposely to mark their unabated friendship for Colville, and their strong sympathy with him. But, alas! these well-meant letters were viewed in a wrong light. They appeared to Colville as contemptuous acts of pity! He fancied they unjustly believed him guilty! He wrote back cold replies, saying, that the shock of the recent disclosure had been so great that he

must refuse to see any one, and that as soon as his affairs could be settled, he was going abroad for some years.

Agnes also wrote to him. Not in the least suspecting the reason why he offered to break off their engagement, her indignation was extreme. She let her pride and anger vent themselves in a cold acceptance of his renunciation of their engagement. News travelled slowly in those days. She was not in London, and she was ignorant of the terrible result of the trial, otherwise all her sympathies would have been enlisted for her lover in spite of any apparent fault towards herself. Even as it was, she repented of her angry letter as soon as it was sent: she determined to write next day: but then pride prevailed, and she hesitated—this hesitation was fatal! Arthur Colville was half maddened by this additional blow: without waiting to hear again from her, he left his affairs to be settled by his agent; he hastened from home, and was soon on his way to the Continent, and from thence he sent the stern rule that no letters were to be forwarded.

Agnes *did* write, and she wrote an affectionate, penitent letter. It arrived after Colville had left! and although it was forwarded to him in spite of his orders, and he received it some months after-

wards, he never read it! His heart was then hardened, and his terrible misanthropy confirmed, and the letter was cast indignantly into the fire.

We have told enough to make the reader understand, if they cannot forgive, Arthur Colville for his misanthropy. The wound he had received gave him an utter disbelief in the goodness or truthfulness of any human being.

He went abroad with his faithful servant Hodson, with no fixed idea of that utter seclusion which he afterwards resolved upon; but very soon extreme depression of spirit and great misery took this line. We know the rest.

It was now six years since that miserable day on which he had quitted his home. Those years had made Arthur Colville what we have seen him; and those years, whilst they had sobered down some of Agnes Spencer's pride, had made her value more highly the love which she had so recklessly cast aside, and she determined to devote every energy of her life to the restoration of her lover to his friends and to himself. For a time—a long dreary time—all her inquiries as to his place of residence, or even as to his return to England, were fruitless; but when at length the secret dawned upon her, her invention was set to work to gain access to him. The reader may

guess that the garden woman was but one of her disguises. It seemed as if a fatality attended her, when the first, the only words addressed to her since their cruel alienation had been a curse !

She little dreamt that when first captivated by Lucy Crofton, she saw in her a possible rival ! but when the idea was once received, Mrs. Walter Crofton, Barker Preston, Lord Englefield, even Lucy herself unconsciously helped to confirm the suspicion. I can hardly imagine a greater trial to such a person. With that strong, stormy character, there was joined the deepest tenderness of a woman's nature. Nothing could have been more mad, foolish, and inexcusable than her conduct in those early days of her inconsiderate girlhood ; and yet she loved Arthur Colville with the same characteristic enthusiasm and intensity of affection with which she idolized her father or devoted herself to her friends.

The struggle in her heart when she received the conviction of his attachment to Lucy can therefore be imagined ; angry jealousy at first seemed to overwhelm her ; but the nobler and better feelings of her nature soon conquered. She resolved to come at once to Lucy and to learn the truth, for suspense to such a nature was unbearable. If her fears were well founded, she

and Lucy must part for a long term of years; for as yet it would be impossible to endure to see her and Arthur together; but her affection should not waver; she would love Lucy as warmly and unselfishly as ever, and at some distant day!.....she did not know what! There seemed no distant day for her! She could not imagine life prolonged to such maturity as should sober down her feelings into calm friendship, or make it ever possible for her to behold Arthur Colville with composure as the husband of another.

After the first distressing moments in which she had poured forth her misery to her father when her ill-judged letter had divided her from her lover, she had never spoken to any one openly about her unhappiness.

She had then had a short, but severe, illness; and after that she braved it out in the world, as if nothing had befallen her.

Hope, indeed, supported her for some time. She had no suspicion—as no one could have had—that Colville would banish himself for ever. She thought he would relent; and she constantly expected to hear of his return to England. She little dreamt that neither she nor any of his friends were ever to hear of him again, after that fatal day! All her inquiries as to his movements

for a long time were fruitless ; no one received any tidings of him, and at last others seemed to forget him : while she only thought of him more incessantly and with more devoted affection. At length she had discovered that he was living at Hulse House, and now she and Lucy Crofton were speaking of him together without reserve.

It seemed to Agnes as if she could never hear or ask enough ! Question after question followed one another ; and, as Lucy answered her, she sat listening as if her whole soul went with her words ; her eyes often swam with tears ; then a smile, or even a little short laugh, burst from her, as some well-known familiar expression or look was described ; and then again, with a sudden overpowering burst of regret and of tenderness, her tears came with almost hysterical violence. Lucy sometimes stopped speaking, in the fear of agitating her too much ; but Agnes immediately entreated her to go on.

“ Remember, Lucy,” she said, “ that this is the first time I have been able to speak of him, and hear of him, for six years ! Do not fear to distress me. Distress me !—think, Lucy, what this sort of distress is to what I have endured these long, long years ! Arthur—dear Arthur ! Ah, Lucy ! when I remember how we used to sit and talk

together, and now to think of him in that desolate, desolate house ! I wonder how the weeds grow in his garden now?.....

His hair gray ?" she said, after a little pause. " That can't be ; mine is not gray, and he cannot have grieved more than I have ! His mind tossed and harassed with doubt ! Ah ! poor, poor Arthur—alone ! alone !—no one to speak to of his doubts ! He who was once surrounded with friends, and who loved to talk with others ! He who spoke so well !

"Ah, yes ! I see it all ! and it was my doing ! That wretched Douglas Treeby's wickedness would not have overwhelmed him but for my desertion. If he could have come to me in his unhappiness, I could have soothed him. He never would have left his home, as he did, but for me ! My cold letter ! How cruel, when he was in such distress ! But I did not know what was happening till afterwards. Oh ! if I had ! But before this there was something wrong ; he was often unreasonably angry with me. I firmly believe that Douglas Treeby did harm between Arthur and me. He was the most winning, beguiling person I ever knew, and Arthur loved him to enthusiasm. I myself was completely taken in

by him, till my eyes were opened by an act of treachery towards his friend, of which Arthur was never told. Knowing that Arthur loved me—nay, that he had even declared his love for me—Douglas Treeby tried to lower Arthur in my eyes, and then the villain dared to speak to me of his own love! *His* love! What I said to him, as he dared to pollute my ears with the declaration of his feelings for me, no doubt made a bitter enemy of him; and from that moment I am almost sure that he deceived Arthur about me, with various lies.

“And then, Lucy, think how dreadful! being almost certain of this just before the terrible crash came—Arthur leaves me! he goes without knowing the truth! believing me guilty of all sorts of indiscretions, and I cannot see him! I cannot write to him! I *cannot, cannot* tell him all that I know would make him love me again! And yet, Lucy, I did see him once! But he did not know me—it must have been a fate, something prophetic—it was terrible, terrible!” and Agnes covered her eyes with her hands, she was again in tears.

But it is unnecessary to go on; the reader is now aware of enough to account for some of the inconsistencies of Agnes Spencer’s manner, as

well as for the leading motives for Arthur Colville's seclusion.

Before Agnes and Lucy parted, it was settled to make no attempt, as yet, to name Agnes to her lover; everything was to remain as before, until she had had time to weigh the subject well, under its new and more hopeful characters.

I often think of Agnes, in her long, lonely journey. She neither saw, nor heard anything, as the carriage wheeled her on through new scenes—all alike indifferent to her. The only thing that seemed present with her was that room at the Parsonage, where she and Lucy had sat together—Lucy's words, Lucy's look, as she had said, “There is no attachment between myself and Mr. Colville: there never was, there never can be any!”

But did she think that her troubles were ended? Did she think, because he was not Lucy's lover, that he would again be hers? Ah, Agnes! poor Agnes Spencer! you are too happy now. Cannot you see that the storm is not over?

As to Lucy herself, when Agnes was gone, she half expected to awake, and find all that had passed that day to have been nothing but a dream; and when, on the following morning, she

was summoned to the drawing-room to see Mr. Colville, this, too, seemed strangely unreal. The impassioned words of Agnes were resting on her heart; her sympathies had been brought so close to him, that she felt as if some mysterious influence must make him aware of it; and she was startled and chilled, when, after running down stairs with her cheek flushed and her heart beating fast with excitement, she found him unusually careless and indifferent. She sat down, looking blank and hopeless. She had thought so much of this first meeting! Mrs. Walter went on talking; Mr. Colville looking stiff and proud; until some remark of Lucy's happened to interest him, and then his look and manner were softened, and Lucy's cheek was again flushed with hope.

"This is love," thought Mrs. Walter, "or I am very much mistaken!"

She was very much mistaken; for each had another object of affection: but Colville's was so far back in the distance of thought, with such a waste of pain and anger between, that it was no at all impossible or unlikely for him to form a new attachment.

"A most extraordinary disclosure indeed," said my sister Martha."

"I expected it all the time," said Jane.

"Expected it?" echoed Martha, angrily. "What nonsense, Jane! my brother never meant you to expect it, and he took great care to deceive us both; and I, for one, will candidly own that his trouble was not thrown away! He never even told us that Mr. Colville had been in love!"

CHAPTER IV.

WINTER days were come; and there were long, dark afternoons, sad to those who had no companions to cheer away the gloom of shortening daylight. To the recluse at Hulse House this was a trying time. Four o'clock—darkness coming thicker and thicker, filling up the recesses of the room, till nothing was left discernible but the small circle of carpet and rug surrounding the fire-place—the fire casting flickering lights on the empty chairs that came within reach of its blaze. Cold wind and scuds of rain or snow against the windows. No prospect of a cheerful day on the morrow. True November weather, rain, fog, or sleet; and here, in the firelight, memories and imaginations alone to break the monotony of that long, dark time.

There were memories more vivid than could well be borne under the present desolation.

Memories of November afternoons, when the moments only passed too rapidly. Douglas Treeby's large blue eyes, and sweet smiles, and the peculiarly pleasant tones of his voice, arose to his recollection in many eager talks by the fireside—as they spoke together of tales of boyish daring, or indulged in later ambitious aspirations after fame and honour in public life. And there were memories also of more exciting, and yet more quiet talks with her who was more than a friend. How often had he and Agnes Spencer held long conversations together at Hillesden, in this dim, dark time, when hidden, cherished thoughts crept forth under the shelter of the twilight! And if memory and imagination widened the circle, how many afternoons there were with other friends at home or at Hillesden, or at various, cheerful, sociable country-houses, where the pleasant afternoon, made it worth while to look forward to the evening as a short, happy time!

But now there was the unbroken silence, the unchanging loneliness, the book read with no object but to keep away *ennui*—the next hour a ditto to the last, the next hour the same—the next, and still the next, and so on till the accustomed relief came, with the end of that day's tedious-

ness ; and hours of forgetfulness in sleep were gladly welcomed as a partial rest to the weariness of waking thought. But then with morning light came another day, equally devoid of interest, and another, and another.

Arthur Colville sat looking into the red embers of the fire : he watched the blaze that kept up its regular flapping sound ; and these hours and days spread themselves with weary length before his mind's eye. How could they be borne ? Where was the strength to bear them ? It was impossible to use strength where there was nothing to resist, and no enemy to strive and grapple with, and *ennui* was a shapeless enemy ; if he strove against it, it滑ed away—he pushed against nothing ; vigour was misplaced—on—on—sliding unresisted, till his own strength was gone, like the fall of a dream !

Interests !—what did these dark, cold hours bring ? The poor !—he *had* given orders—they were attended to—there was nothing fresh to be done ! Study !—for what ?—amusement ? There were days when the sun shone cheerfully without, when books gave him much pleasure ; but for what should he study ?—To shine in conversation ? Where were his associates ? He glanced round. He had no companions, but the portraits that hung

on the walls, and there was neither mind nor spirit imprisoned in the canvass on which they were depicted. A faint, sickly smile, stole over his face, as he asked of them for conversation. Could he read to write?—for whom, and why? The world was hated and renounced, and why should he write for those with whom he would not even converse? Then if he read to know, to be learned!—For what was it? What was knowledge and learning! Death would come, and knowledge with it, or—he shuddered—or cease to be! No, no! all was over!—there was no hope left!

And then came a change in the current of his thoughts, and there was the question—“But why? Who said there was no hope? Who had said that he must not mix again amongst his equals—that his race was run—that there were neither honours nor fame open to his efforts? That the busy brain, the clear intellect, the vivid imagination—all capable of planning and achieving great and useful things—must remain inactive and stagnant—useless to himself, unknown to the world! He was still young, his energies were only dormant. Fame—distinction! why not grasp at them, and obtain them!

But for what?—for whom?—No, no! the

momentary dream was gone. The enthusiasm that, for an instant, glowed and lighted up his heart, was quenched. Habit and indolence resumed their power—he sank. The fire's untiring blaze flapped on, dreary and monotonous as before.

And now let us look at the Parsonage during those same dull, darkening hours.

The fire casts its flickering light, as at Hulse House. Lucy Crofton sits at the window. She looks out into the dim, dreary world, darkening before her. For a moment her face was very sad; her thoughts just then were not unlike Arthur Colville's. But she roused herself; she resisted the ungrateful spirit of despondence that was creeping over her. There was still daylight enough at the large bay window, to enable her to see to read; she determined to give her attention to her book—which was an interesting one Walter had recommended to her, and which she knew she should please him by reading. Her effort was successful; and she was soon intent upon the subject of the book, and self and selfish troubles were forgotten.

The door opened, and Walter came in; he was tired, and had been harassed by some annoying business in his parish. He was not disposed to talk, and it was now too dark for reading.

"It is just the light for music," he said; and Lucy was glad to sing to him some of his favourite ballads. His eye brightened; his brow was smoothed. At times there was a comfortable little murmur of his voice with the music; and after a pause, a brisk demand for some favourite air; and then Mrs. Walter entered, intent on various important matters of work.

Candles were brought. Mrs. Walter interrupted Lucy between the first and second verses of her song, to tell her that there would be a great deal of work for her to do in the evening. Lucy did not stop to think of the comparative pains and pleasures arising from the duties of kindness and natural affection, but she was pleased to be useful. As she went on singing, Mrs. Walter's head nodded contentedly to the tune. "I like that song," she said; "it reminds me of the old house at Sheetley, and the prettiest blue gown and little brooch I had to match! Everybody admired it; and the thread was so much better in those days! Yes, that is just the tune!—hum, hum, um, um, um!—and the eyes of the needles were twice as large! Oh, Lucy! do come and thread this stupid little needle for me, and then pray sing that tune once more."

But I need not go on; there was a little

pleasant talk with Walter about the book, and the dressing-bell rang before it seemed possible that the dark, dull hours could have passed.

Cheerfulness had spread itself round the room without any attempt on Lucy's part, after presumptuous acts of self-sacrificing martyrdom; but in the exercise of simple, natural affection, guided by good principles, her own happiness and that of others was wisely and rationally promoted.

CHAPTER V.

AFTER a long interval Mr. Colville came again to the Parsonage. It was in those dreaded hours of twilight before dinner. It happened to be on a day when Lucy had received a letter from Agnes. Walter was out on a distant expedition, and Mrs. Walter, as usual, contrived to leave Lucy alone with him.

“ He certainly is very slow about his proposal,” she thought; “ but no doubt these recluses take longer than others to make up their minds. To be sure there is no great hurry, for turkeys come in very nicely at Christmas ; and we must have one or two dinners when the thing is settled, to introduce him to the neighbourhood.”

“ This is dull weather,” said Mr. Colville, half sarcastically, as he sat down near Lucy, as if he felt an apology necessary for coming at an unusual hour. “ There is more darkness at Hulse

House than here," he said, and added, with his half mocking tone, "mental more than actual. However, it is the gloomy privilege of Englishmen to be melancholy in this month." Mr. Colville still spoke mockingly.

Lucy's thoughts were busy with Agnes: her letter was actually on the table. What, thought Lucy, if by chance he had seen it! would this mocking tone have continued? Books were the safest, indeed almost the only possible subject of conversation; they talked for some little time about the book Lucy had been reading. Mr. Colville was becoming natural and easy in his conversation till there was a short pause—enough to enable him to recollect himself—and turning to Lucy, he asked her abruptly,

"But why do you read?

"I suppose," Lucy said, after a minute's thought, and half smiling, "I suppose I read to amuse and to improve myself. Is that a satisfactory reason?"

"Certainly," said Colville, "if it *does* amuse and improve you."

"As to the first, I have no doubt," was her reply.

"And the second?" said Colville.

"The mind will not stand still," was Lucy's an-

swer; “and I fear we must either improve or the reverse.”

“It is difficult to say what improvement means,” said Colville, drily.

“It is, indeed,” said Lucy, and she sighed, half abstractedly; but she added, “I spoke lightly, and just as the world accepts the term ‘to improve oneself.’ It is as doubtful as it is difficult to know how or when we really improve ourselves or others!” and this was said with unusual bitterness, for Agnes Spencer was at her heart.

“And whom would you improve?” said Mr. Colville, after a short pause, fixing his eyes upon her; “and whom would you improve?”

Lucy almost started. Did Mr. Colville read her thoughts? Why should she start! Why should she conceal the truth? She said then, quietly and simply,

“I do not think the continued indulgence of sorrow is right; and in this respect, Mr. Colville, I wish for improvement in you.”

Mr. Colville gave a keen, searching look at Lucy. His voice, as he spoke, had a tone of new and touching interest.

“I see that you are speaking the truth, Miss Crofton,” he said; “there is neither affected interest nor pretended zeal in what you say, but

simple charitable kindness." He paused, and then said, "It is new and strange to me to let any human being speak even of *reproachful* interest! It is long since I have heard—since I have allowed—" he was agitated, his voice became tremulous, "it is long since I have allowed any one—since I have *wished* that any one should speak to me of sympathy, and now it is too late! it is useless!" He paused, and then his habitual half sarcastic tone was resumed, as he added, "There is need for much improvement I know, but I fear it is much too late for me to attempt to improve myself."

The icy crust had closed again, and Lucy felt that her words could only slide on the cold surface. She did not speak at first, and then she said, with some effort and as a sort of apology,

"The word improvement, as applied to others, sounds presumptuous, and you may have understood it so, although I did not mean it;" and she added, sadly, "There is more work for myself in that respect than I can perform; but the sense of my own difficulties makes me conscious of those of others. I know how much I often feel the want of help, and I fancy that others must do the same."

Mr. Colville was again softened. The sadness of Lucy's voice touched him.

"This help is, then, a duty in your eyes?" he said, eagerly. "You own it to be such! You speak of your own difficulties, and of your consciousness of those of others! Doubts and perplexities of mind are indeed difficulties which demand help! You will not, then, refuse it? If I ask for *your* kind thoughts—if I ask for prayers such as *you* can breathe for one who is tossed, and torn, and almost overwhelmed with mental conflicts, you will not deny them to me? If, indeed, goodness or kindness exist, if there is any truth in such ideas, may there not be a healing influence where the sympathy of the good and true is at work?"

His eyes appealed to Lucy, or rather, as it were, to that invisible sympathy or influence, which Lucy's intelligence and goodness had made him suppose to be a reality: for she herself was still nothing to him individually.

Lucy met his anxious look with an open unembarrassed one.

"Yes, indeed!" she said, with a tone of great earnestness and sweetness, "you need not doubt my wishes for you; every human being has a claim on our prayers, our kindness, and our sym-

pathy. It is a debt we all owe to one another, and we all need it more or less. Even those who have not had sorrows, how much more the unhappy. It is such a blessing to have this gift to bestow," she added, simply, "for it is a secret unostentatious one, at which no one can be mortified or offended, as it is bestowed unconsciously; unless, indeed, it is asked for and promised," she said, slightly smiling, "as I ask for it now from you, and promise it to you in return."

Mr. Colville looked up at her quickly; there was inquiry in his look. Lucy's idea struck him: it was new, and it touched his heart. He looked at her to see that there was no affectation or hypocrisy in what she said. He shaded his eyes for an instant; and, after a short pause, he said,

"There are distresses of mind—depths that the innocent can scarcely fathom. Years back I could have answered your appeal with as open and unreserved a heart as yours! But I cannot explain—I would not wish to pain you by doing so. Incomprehensible even to myself—to you inexplicable; but there are memories and thoughts such as....." he hesitated, then added quickly, as if anxious not to let himself reveal any more of his own feelings, "but I do not wish to wound you by speaking of the perplexities and cavils

that have been engendered in my mind by great misfortunes. It would be an ungrateful return for your kindness if I tried to disturb *your* faith in what is good. Let me only thank you, as I do most heartily, for what you have said, and *promised* ;” he added: “ I do not say this as a mere act of courtesy—these falsenesses are passed for me—but because I really feel grateful. All that I can repay I will, in my earnest wishes and hopes that a sorrow such as mine may never darken your mind, or that of those you love.”

“ Well, Lucy,” said Mrs. Walter, when Mr. Colville was gone, “ you have had a nice little time for talking all in the dark. You did not ring for candles, and, indeed, I dare say you did not wish for them.”

There was something remarkably joyful in Mrs. Walter’s tone, and Lucy was glad that she was pleased, though she hardly knew why. She said she had not liked to disturb Mr. Colville by sending for the servant.

“ Oh, no ! you were quite right. These interruptions often stop everything.”

Lucy did not particularly attend to her sister-in-law’s words, as she was intently occupied with thoughts of Mr. Colville and Agnes, but she felt it

safe to agree that interruptions were troublesome, and Mrs. Walter was confirmed in the idea which had kept her out of the drawing-room till a very late hour.

The next day brought Barker Preston.

“I am heartily glad to see you looking so well, Miss Crofton,” he said, “indeed I am; and I thought, from experience, that you never would; for once I had a favourite dog that was very ill, and when it was by way of getting well, it never looked like itself for a long time, just like you; and I could not eat my dinner or anything for fretting about it; and so, when I saw you looking so pale and weak, I just remembered my poor dog, which never got well at all, and I felt very low indeed—quite cut up! Indeed, Miss Crofton, you need not laugh, for it was quite true! However, nothing pleases me more than to see you so merry again!” and he looked at her with delight, as she could not help laughing at the curiousness of his simile. “That recluse though,” thought he. “Now I know he was here yesterday in the dusk, and it is such a nice, cosy, snug time for saying anything one thinks; and Mrs. Walter made such a mystery of it! and here she is, look-

ing better! This mad fellow cheers her up, and I.....”

He was going on, when Lucy, who had been sealing a letter, turned to him again, saying, with a smile,

“I know you like to be useful, Mr. Preston, and it will be a great kindness if you will put this letter in the post for me.”

Barker Preston received the letter with as much respect as if it had been a costly present. “I am sure it will give a great deal of pleasure to any one who receives it,” he said, energetically. “Now, I may as well just name that fellow,” he thought, “and see how she looks. So Mr. Colville comes sometimes?” he said aloud, then coloured up, and turned away, afraid to watch the effect of his words.

“Yes,” said Lucy, and Barker Preston thought her voice grave.

“He is very queer!” he said, with a desperate effort.

“Why?” said Lucy, quickly and anxiously. “Do you know anything fresh of him?”

“Fresh! no,” said Barker Preston, with a sad voice; “I think I know enough already.”

A few days after this visit Walter received a note from Mr. Colville, and on the following day

he was again sitting in the library at Hulse, in that same dim dark time on which I have already commented.

As Walter entered, Mr. Colville met him with some eagerness; but, when they were seated, he seemed to sink back into reserve, and to be half unwilling to open the conversation. He answered a commonplace remark of Walter's in an equally commonplace manner. There was a moment's silence. Mr. Colville seemed to have a struggle with himself, and then, as if he had overcome his unwillingness to utter his thoughts to Walter, he said,

“I was at your house not many days ago, Mr. Crofton; I went at an unusual hour—this same dark hour; in short, there are days—hours rather, when solitude presses heavily upon me, as you, I believe, would wish it to press;” and he half smiled, and his voice reassumed its querulous, ironical tone; “as I believe you would wish it to press where the solitude is self-imposed, where there is the power of breaking through it, of being again a man of the world, with pursuits among my fellow men, with pleasures, with ties, with some to love and some to hate me, some to deceive, and some to be deceived by, to be again as others are, to be happy, or to pretend to be so.

If I mistake not, your wishes for me are such as these, such as I could realise if—and here is the question—if I thought it wise to do so?"

" You take for granted what my wishes are for you," said Walter; " but you are partly mistaken. I *do* wish you to mix in the world again, to mix among your fellow creatures; but it is with a high and a wise object; not merely to be, or to pretend to be happy—*that* is unimportant—but that, living with others, you may perform those duties of self-denial, forbearance, benevolence, and cheerfulness, which, it seems to me, none of us have a right to neglect. When I wish you to reappear in the world it is for this object, and that you should afford a good example to others by a well-spent, active, useful life. But, excuse me, Mr. Colville," said Walter, checking himself, " if I have spoken with too much bluntness."

" Excuse you?" said Colville, warmly; " it is sincerity, honesty, truth, I want! And yet you are wrong," he said, half querulously, " wrong both ways. I have no qualities to be of use amongst my equals; and do I not live amongst my neighbours—the poor? I have not shut my doors against them; I have tried in some little way to be useful to them—perhaps not wisely or profitably; still this is not to the purpose. I am

wrong perhaps, and I do not view these things as you do ; and, indeed, I sent for you, Mr. Crofton, to speak on a question.....” He hesitated ; “ I told you I had been to your house.....”

Colville’s voice became soft, almost tremulous, and, after a slight pause, he continued.

“ There was one subject on which since then.....” again he hesitated; he seemed struggling with some emotion, trying to speak, and yet unable to put in words the feelings that in some way or other affected and touched him. “ Something of a new light broke in upon me that day,” he continued, “ something whispered to me of hope—of the power of others.....”

But he checked himself; he drew up, as it were, in his mind; and whatever it was that made him send for Walter, was suddenly overcome and subdued by pride or unbelief, and as the next words were uttered, his voice had resumed its mocking tone. “ But still,” he said, “ this is a question which is hardly for others to answer. I would rather talk with you on subjects more within the scope of reason:” and then he launched forth on some speculative, philosophical question, such as he might have discussed as profitably with a heathen philosopher as with a Christian minister, his tone becoming more

dry and sarcastic at every word. The thing was lost ! whatever it was, it was gone ; and Mr. Colville was once more the cynical recluse with head not heart—the heart might have been abstracted.

CHAPTER VI.

MY sister Martha here remarked, that before I proceeded, she wished to know something of the family at the old Baronial Hall.

Lord Raymond, I said, was a kind-hearted, remarkably good-humoured man, who saw the sunny side of life, and seemed anxious to contribute his share in making every one else see it.

Lady Raymond, with her placid, gentle manners and soft pretty face, was well suited to him. She had that quiet amiability and half-indolent unselfishness which makes a woman much loved as a wife and as a mother.

The great trial of Lord and Lady Raymond's lives had been the loss of their only boy, and the suffering health of their eldest daughter Ellen; but the Raymonds were simple, pious Christians, and these sorrows were received humbly and

without murmur. Indeed Ellen Raymond's delicate health was scarcely made a trouble, owing to her own gay, lively nature, inherited from her father. And now, when I introduce the reader to the old Baronial Hall she is laughing and talking very merrily with her mother and sister.

"I knew how it would be, Margaret," she said, "long before you chose to suppose there was anything but friendship! Friendship, indeed! I can see more quickly as I lie here on my sofa than you who go roaming from room to room, and walking in the woods of Berkeley Manor, and getting lost there! Eh! Margaret?"

"Ah! my dear," said Lady Raymond, "I was very much alarmed on that day till I knew that she was not alone. But now, my dear Margaret, to return to what we were saying:—Each time I think of your engagement, I feel more happy about it."

"The only thing I don't like," said Ellen, "is the secresy. When I am happy I long to tell all the world. I suppose that papa is right, as he always is, of course; but I wish we need not wait till Margaret's birthday."

"But what does *he* say to it in his letter today?" she said, turning to Margaret. "Is he anxious to tell his friends?"

"He wishes Miss Crofton to know before any one else," said Margaret, "and as he is unwilling to write about it, he would rather wait till he can see her."

And now I must turn from the prosperous Margaret Raymond, the course of whose love was running as smoothly as if it were untrue, and look at the Parsonage, where Lucy Crofton is only harassed by anxieties for the love affairs of others. She is reading a letter from Agnes Spencer, with a perplexed and anxious face.

"I shall soon be at Digby Manor," Agnes wrote. "I did not tell you till I had fixed to come, for I knew when once my mind was made up to brave the worst, that I could not bear contradiction; and now, Lucy, I must ask your help. I wish you to name me to Arthur, and if you are able to do so, tell me honestly and exactly all that passes. It is better that I should know the truth, painful or not. Ah! Lucy, before I am once more within a few miles of his home, you will, perhaps, have seen him!"

After this letter, Lucy passed every afternoon in nervous dread, the door-bell made her start, and the colour fly from her face; and even Mrs. Crofton began to remark Lucy's nervousness, and

she satisfied herself that she must be expecting Mr. Colville and a proposal.

At length Lucy began to wonder why she had expected Mr. Colville to come again so soon, and she sat down to the pianoforte for the first time since Agnes's letter, without having gone through an imaginary dialogue, beginning, "Oh, Mr. Colville!" and always sticking fast there. She actually did not hear the door-bell, and it was not till a voice that sounded very awful and terrible, pronounced the dreaded words, "Mr. Colville, ma'am," that Lucy knew the moment had arrived for which she had been trembling. There was no escape—and courage came from very desperation.

The conversation began much as usual. Some book was soon the topic; this lasted for a time, and then Mr. Colville spoke of some poor people. This too lasted its time.

"Now," thought Lucy, "when his questions are over, I must turn the conversation to my purpose."

Mr. Colville got on a new topic, that of gardening—it was a lucky subject. Lucy spoke of the beautiful garden at Mr. Digby's. She knew Agnes had brought them some roses, why not say so? One instant's pause, and then—

"I think the rose is my favourite flower," she began.

"Yes," said Mr. Colville, "there is nothing so beautiful as the blushing nondescript tint within a rose. It is far too faint and delicate for art to imitate."

"Yes," said Lucy, "and there are some new roses;" she was going to say, "some that Miss Spencer brought," but Mr. Colville interrupted her with—

"I hate new ones—the fashion has spoilt roses, as it has many other things," he added, sarcastically.

"I think you would not say so of roses," said Lucy, half breathlessly, whilst she worked diligently at her embroidery, "if you saw some at—at Digby Manor. Miss Spencer brought some beautiful ones."

It was said. Did Mr. Colville hear? Lucy wished to look up, but she dared not; she proceeded to prevent any mistake—to prevent his thinking it might be some other Miss Spencer.

"She brought them from Hillesden."

There was no reply; Lucy *must* look up. What was it to Agnes otherwise? A pamphlet was in Mr. Colville's hand; his face was concealed; the hand that held the paper trembled.

She pretended to be still working; an instant, and then she looked again; the pamphlet no longer shaded Mr. Colville's face; it was pale as death, and large drops of perspiration stood on his forehead. He spoke as she looked up, but Lucy could hardly have recognised his voice.

"I will borrow this book if you please," he said. He rose, as if to take leave. "Mr. Crofton will perhaps allow me to do so." He sat down again; he had miscalculated his strength; he thought that he could have reached the door, but his limbs failed him.

"Cruel," thought Lucy; "cruel trial! Oh! why was I to wound him in this way?"

Mr. Colville sat there, his head bowed down with overpowering anguish. Lucy could hardly restrain her tears; she longed to entreat him to forgive her; but the only real kindness towards him was to go on speaking as if all she saw and felt had no reality. She must spare him in the only way in her power, by pretending blindness; she spoke of the pamphlet, said her brother she knew would lend it; went on to say she scarcely knew what, and she was certain Mr. Colville would not know—anything to go on speaking, and to give him time to recover his composure. How many sentences she strung together about the number

of books Walter lent or borrowed, mattered not; how many wrong stitches at the work she fortunately held in her hand, mattered still less. Mr. Colville regained some degree of calmness; he rose again, thanked her for the book, bowed, and was gone. Then Lucy's tears burst forth.

"Oh! Agnes, Agnes!" thought she, "what love you have thrown away."

What passed in Arthur Colville's mind we need not try to depict. During that miserable evening in his desolate home, it would have made any heart bleed to see him.

"I might have guessed it," he thought; "the strange interest I felt in her—why—why was it, but that she too should pierce my heart." Then again he thought, "I will brave it;" but his spirit died within him even as the thought came. He paused; his eyes fell on the Bible, which had hitherto been used, more, alas! for cavil and critical examination, than for religious comfort and instruction. He seized it as if half superstitiously, trying for anything to ease a pain of mind greater than he knew how to bear. He opened it; he read, "*He was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.*" The words fell on his heart, he knew not why; he had read them often before, and no meaning seemed attached to

them. But now a light shone for an instant into his soul; he felt that there was one who could behold his misery, who could sympathise with him, who was *acquainted* with grief. Such joy came for that one moment, that his eyes filled with tears of gratitude. It was a moment such as he would have given worlds to recall ; but was his heart indeed hardened? The moment passed; the feelings it had witnessed were gone likewise. Once more Colville was alone, with pride as his only strength and resource.

“ I am not forgotten then ! ” wrote Agnes, in answer to Lucy’s account of her interview with Mr. Colville. “ It is enough : I am satisfied ! with such power to wound, have I not also power to heal?.....Do you remember the ring? the iron grasp it used to take is loosened, and it now seems to press with a gentle loving pressure on my finger. Who knows but that he may again place it there, with *new* words—yet *old* words of love.”

“ Is this then her hope ? ” thought Lucy, sadly.
“ Alas ! she deceives herself ; it will not be.”

The week passed ; the day was come for the Spencers’ arrival at Digby Manor, and the Croftons went to meet them ; but Mr. Colville had never been again to the Parsonage.

Agnes left Digby Manor, sad and broken in

spirit ; she had not seen Arthur Colville, and how could she ? Lucy returned home, and it was a relief to be out of the reach of the anxious questionings of Agnes, whose very life seemed to hang on having hope ; but Lucy could not drive her restless sorrow from her thoughts, and as she sat at home that afternoon she felt thoroughly depressed. She tried to read and then tried music, but melancholy fancies arranged themselves to the very notes of the most lively airs, and in each tone she seemed to hear some sad prophecy of evil.

Whilst she was in this mood Mr. Colville was announced. There was nothing cheering in his look or manner ; he came evidently as a duty alone ; he was unusually stern and reserved. Walter was accidentally at home, and as he and Mr. Colville talked together, Lucy was able to be silent.

“ There is no hope ! ” exclaimed she, when Mr. Colville left the room, forgetting that Walter was present. Walter’s reply reminded her that she had spoken aloud, but luckily there might be a double meaning to her words.

“ Indeed, I fear there is but little,” was Walter’s grave reply. “ I fancied one day that he was going to tell me something of his feelings, but

then came a check, and I fear that his heart is as little softened as ever.

The winter was gone, and there had been no fresh visit from Mr. Colville. Agnes's letters were melancholy; her father was not well; he was confined to his room with a fall, and an attack of gout.

Lucy heard nothing of George Berkeley, but one vague rumour. The old story that he was to marry Margaret Raymond was revived. Though untrue once, must it always be so?

It was a lovely day in April—something of summer in the bright sunshine and the fragrance of flowers—when Mrs. Walter Crofton, with joyful surprise, saw Mr. Colville once more enter the drawing-room at the Parsonage. Though Lucy was out of doors, Mrs. Crofton contrived to send for her, and to leave her alone with Mr. Colville. At first both he and Lucy were ill at ease, but after awhile the conversation became interesting; and when Mr. Colville left, Lucy was humming the air of a song as she ran lightly upstairs.

Mrs. Walter listened, with sisterly pleasure, to the notes warbled forth in Lucy's clear, sweet voice. "Of course, I was right! I always am!" thought she, with a complacent, inward chuckle.

And again Mr. Colville came, but too evidently with Lucy as his object; there was not the slightest allusion to Agnes, nor any attempt to gain information about her indirectly: but this visit was not without interest of another sort.

“Perhaps you have forgotten,” he said, “some words of yours which have dwelt on my mind. You said one day that we all of us owe a duty to our fellow creatures—the duty of kind thoughts and prayers. I could offer nothing in return! no prayers for you!” And he said, mournfully, “My prayers would be but mockery! a mockery that might bring a curse, instead of a blessing, on those for whom I dared to utter them! But, Miss Crofton, will you let me remind you of your promise? Will you let me think that you, who *can* pray, will in charity continue to pray for me? Is this request presumptuous, or may I count upon your promise in many dark times of trial that are before me?”

“If I had no higher motive for making me fulfil my promise,” said Lucy, “my interest in you would prevent me from neglecting it.”

She spoke simply, but with emotion.

Mr. Colville almost started. “You feel an interest then? You feel an interest?” he repeated. “And why is this? Why is such interest

to have no influence? Why should it glance upon its object without any effect? Why is the power of these kind thoughts to be frustrated? How is it that the one Eternal Being, whom we are told is more tender, merciful, and loving, than any of His creatures—why is it that He leaves the craving soul in darkness?—that He permits treachery and wickedness to work successfully against the happiness and trust of those who would otherwise love virtue and truth—whilst you and others—if there are others like you?—pray, and wish, and hope.....” But Mr. Colville paused; he had given way to his thoughts, and then stopped, as if conscious that he might shock Lucy with the expression of his unbelieving doubts.

“Ah! Mr. Colville,” said Lucy, “do we not know that whatever goodness exists in any human being is simply derived from God? Oh! how I wish I could put in words so that you could understand me—even the very smallest part of the joy, and hope, and trust, I feel, whenever I think of the love and goodness of God! But, indeed, I know how it is in sorrow”—she added, blushing at her own earnestness—“I know what terrible doubts and fears sometimes assail us; and it is not our peaceful, happy thoughts, but our

fearful ones, that we are ready to express. It is natural, I suppose! It is that which troubles us, which needs a voice, which seeks for sympathy."

"Which seeks for sympathy!" said Mr. Colville, repeating her words as he saw her face beaming with enthusiasm. "Yes! indeed for such sympathy as yours," he added. "And yet why should I wish for it? I have had my spring and summer of happiness and of hope: there was a fine display of leaves and flowers in the garden of my thoughts;" he smiled ironically: "the winter came, and every leaf and flower withered, and the branches were left bare and unsightly to fight against the cold."

"Yes," said Lucy, "but let me continue your simile. The winter came over your happiness and pleasures to show you that they depended on a higher law than yours, and that these bare, unsightly branches can bud forth again and blossom without your help, if you will not wilfully cut them off and destroy their vitality."

"Can you then, indeed, expect any return of summer for me?" said Mr. Colville. "I should have made my simile more complete by saying that when the winter left the tree bare and exposed to the wind and the frost, the tree perished. Even your spring will not come again to a tree

that is *dead*. No, no ! there is no hope for me ! Nevertheless," he added, " to drop the simile, I have been comforted even now in believing, madly, vainly, or superstitiously, that your prayers were resting upon me; I have fancied, and dared to hope at times that they will ward off that mysterious spirit of evil which overwhelms and envelops me. Then, Miss Crofton, although the tree of *happiness* is dead, let me ask again for your kind thoughts and prayers ; they may not, they *cannot* give me happiness, but they may in some degree lessen the despair that is possibly at hand ;" and Mr. Colville's face became dark as if with some foreboding, some nameless dread or terror as he spoke.

" And is it so ?" he thought, as he sat in his library that evening at Hulse House, " that I have power left to free myself from this weight ? Is it light or darkness that surrounds me ? what I imagined the truer light, is it but the dimness which obscures the true. Her look of joy ! her serenity ! there is no delusion there ! If she is mistaken, her error brings peace to her soul. Can the intelligence and purity expressed in her face be things that have no reality, no home beyond this wicked, unappreciating one ? What is the spiritual life that beams in her countenance ?

What does this soul-like expression mean if here is all? She, too, has had her winter; will there be a spring and summer for her in this world, or is the promise of nature to be verified—Will the summer be *after* the winter of this life? For what are those virtues? for what that intellect, those noble thoughts if only for this?"

He looked round at the walls of his room.

"A narrow cell!" he thought, and almost smiled at the absurdity of the idea. "She, it is true, has a rather wider cell, yet still is there room or need for all that exists in that soul? Is it for those two or three with whom she lives that genius, thought, memory, anticipation are bestowed? Sorrow! yes, this she may, she *has* had. It is common and constant in this visible world; but are the glow of enthusiasm, the high aspirings given for endurance alone! No, no! she is right! She promised me her prayers; mysterious, inconceivable, yet true, spirit meeting spirit in thought, what but mystery is this? Now, even now, her thoughts may be upon me! her wishes, her prayers, floating into that invisible, unknown space from whence thought arises. But from whence? from whence does it come or go? whither, or how? utterly unknown!....."

He paused.

“I was right, indeed, to ask for her prayers. If accepted—if received.....” A struggle was in his mind; the struggle between new half-dawning faith and the old inquiring cynical unbelief, but hope and faith for the time gained the mastery; the bent brow, the compressed lips relaxed; a sweet smile stole gently over his face, and there was peace—passing, evanescent it might be, but for the moment it was there.

The tempests of thought were likewise passing over Agnes Spencer, but in her it was neither speculation nor philosophy, but anxiety for that which this real, actual world could bestow. One human being, mortal like herself, was the object of all her hopes and fears, the cause of all her agitation. Could she meet her lover again? Would he forgive her? Would he still love her? Beyond this there was neither thought nor care; the future was joy or misery, as he made it so to her. I do not mean that religion was nothing to Agnes, or that she cared for no one in the world but Arthur Colville. She was professedly a Christian, and she often had thought earnestly for days and days together on all that concerned her soul. At times she adored God with warm devotion; she loved her fellow-creatures with en-

thusiasm; and she strove to fulfil her duties: but I am speaking of that which was the absorbing subject of hope and speculation. It was this: to meet Arthur Colville in joy or in sorrow, and all happiness or misery seemed included in one or other of these alternatives.

CHAPTER VII.

MRS. WALTER CROFTON was seldom out of humour for more than five minutes together with Edward Crofton. She never allowed that he could be in the wrong, and when he wrote to propose coming to the Parsonage, on the very day on which his letter reached her, she neither talked about "*short notice*," or scolded any one in the household more than usual, and she gave him an affectionate welcome on his arrival.

Lucy thought he looked better and seemed more happy than she had seen him since his unfortunate attachment to Agnes Spencer. But when he had been seated with them for a little time, something in his manner struck her as unusual; he seemed trying to read and trying to talk, and what was more remarkable, he actually got up and looked out of the window several times. What was it? Had he something

to communicate which he waited to do till Mrs. Walter left them alone? After much unhappiness there is a sickening dread of fresh evils, and the idea of anything new causes alarm, as the mind turns at once to the dark side of possible events, instead of the hopeful one; and when Mrs. Walter at length left them alone, Edward laid down his book, rubbed his hands in an ominous manner, looked up, and said, “Do you like news, Lucy?”

Lucy started; she could have screamed with fear, she did not know of what, or why. Edward went on, and the next sentence made her understand her horror the moment before. He said, “I am come from Raymond House.” Lucy heard no more for she knew not how long: the words she most dreaded to hear must be coming! —report had spoken truly! Why did her ears refuse to convey to her the sounds of Edward’s voice? She did not understand why he started and looked at her, but the truth was that her countenance betrayed her agitation. Edward thought that she was tired, and he begged her to go and lie down and rest herself. Lucy tried to speak, but she could not articulate for a few minutes, and in Edward’s concern about her, he perhaps forgot that his news was still untold.

During her past sorrows Lucy had constantly struggled for composure of mind. She smiled at Edward's anxious face, as she prepared herself, for what she thought would soon be a *certain* evil.

"Do you often turn pale?" said Edward; "you used not to do so. You are not well; you want change."

"Yes," said Lucy, faintly, "I want change I think; but, Edward," and she spoke fast to hide her agitation, and the colour rushed back to her face; "but, Edward," she said, "pray tell me your news."

"Oh! not now," said Edward, hastily, "you must be quiet, and I will tell you presently." Edward little knew how much pain his intended kindness was causing Lucy. She could not ask again, for the effort had been enough, and Edward left her to take a walk before dinner-time.

Then Lucy went to her own room. Why had she ever known George Berkeley? Why had she been thus tried? was the faithless thought that for a moment passed through her mind. But she schooled down her agitation, and when she heard Edward's step along the passage, and his knock at her door, she was ready to listen to his communication; the flush on her cheek satisfied Ed-

ward's unpractised eye. There was a little flush on his own, which, however, passed unnoticed by Lucy. They sat down. Lucy clasped her hands firmly together, that she might not shrink under what was to come.

"Now, guess my news!" he said.

"I think I do," was her answer, in as calm a tone as she could command.

"Do you?" Edward said, half surprised.
"What! about Margaret Raymond?"

Lucy nodded her head, as the easiest mode of assent.

"Really!" said Edward, joyfully. "Then do you approve?"

"Lucy did not speak, and Edward looked rather grave, and said, "You think it too soon after....." he hesitated....."after the other," was added hastily.

"Oh! Edward!" was Lucy's trembling exclamation. Had he then known her secret?

"I feared it might seem strange and sudden to you," Edward said, more coldly, "but you must listen. I would not wish to be thought flighty. I am not much used to speak of my feelings to any one—not even to you. I have no sentiment, and hate scenes; but I wish to tell—to explain to

you.....” Lucy began really to listen; the words at first had been like sounds without meaning; she breathed more freely; “to explain to you, who alone knew of the past, how it is that I have so soon.....” Lucy raised her eyes to Edward’s face“that I have so soon learned to love Margaret Raymond,” was quickly added.

Lucy started up, threw her arms round her brother’s neck, and burst into tears.

“You, Edward! you? Margaret Raymond? Oh! how happy I am!”

And Edward, surprised, yet pleased at Lucy’s agitation, kissed her heartily, little dreaming what a revulsion of feeling it was that caused her tears. All was soon explained on his side. He was engaged to Margaret Raymond—*he*, and not George Berkeley, as Lucy had expected, and feared to hear.

The story of his love was not, perhaps, an uncommon one. The strong, passionate affection for a fascinating woman who did not return it, was subdued on principle. About a year after Agnes had rejected him, he and the Raymonds were often thrown together, and he gained Margaret’s affection before he was perhaps quite aware of what he was doing; but her amiable,

attaching qualities won upon him, and he soon found that his love for her made him think without pain of Agnes.

At length Edward ventured to ask Margaret to become his wife. She had a large fortune to bestow besides the wealth of her own warm, devoted affection: and he did not feel very unhappy when his proposal was accepted, and Lord and Lady Raymond gave a joyful consent to their daughter's engagement to him. Edward came from Raymond Hall on purpose to announce his intended marriage to his brother and Mrs. Walter, and to speak to Lucy of his happiness—and thus ended Lucy's day of fear. It had begun placidly; the mid-day had been stormy, troubled, threatening; but the sun had broken forth in the evening, and Lucy could laugh heartily when she saw Mrs. Walter actually jump up, and embrace Edward in her delight at his announcement!

“ Margaret Raymond ! Lord Raymond’s daughter ! an heiress ! My dear Edward ! My dearest Edward !” were her exclamations.

Edward’s love had indeed found the pleasantest cure; and out of all the women of England, Miss Margaret Raymond was the one Lucy most wished to see safely married !

“ You are happy, child ! ” said Edward, that evening, as he raised his eyes from his book, and saw Lucy’s face.

“ Yes, yes ! Edward,” she said, “ you have made me so.”

But there was more happiness than he dreamt of conveyed to her by that day’s intelligence.

“ Margaret Raymond—Edward’s wife—Edward’s ! ” were words constantly passing before her mind. Loveable words ! how sweetly they sounded to her. She caught herself once muttering them, half aloud, and blushed deeply, as she discovered what she was doing ; but no one heard ; and again it was Margaret—not George Berkeley’s, but her’s—her sister—Edward’s wife ! ”

“ Oh, Edward ! you always make me happy,” she said, as she wished him good night, and put up her face to be kissed ; and he, too, felt how much his happiness was increased by her affection.

He knew that she and Margaret would love each other. Yes—and she was George Berkeley’s friend ! Edward’s wife would sometimes talk to her of the friend she had known from childhood.

So Lucy fell asleep that night—the once-dreaded words, “ Margaret Raymond,” gently lulling her to rest.

Edward was soon again at the old baronial hall, and Lucy wrote for the first time to Margaret Raymond. It was that first letter, before acquaintance to one who is, or may be, in the future, dearer and more intimate with all our thoughts and feelings than any other person! It was strange to Lucy to write to this unknown, and yet well-known, Margaret. She knew she should love her. Edward loved her, and George Berkeley loved her as a friend; and as she wrote, every word emanated from these two pleasant ideas. Margaret received the letter in the same spirit in which it was written. She loved each word in it.

“ It is a good letter,” she said, in her little, quiet way. “ It is a dear letter! There is not a word that could be changed that would not make it less perfect.” Edward laughed; he, too, was happy, and was pleased. And Lady Raymond was much gratified by it.

“ My Margaret has received a very nice letter from Edward Crofton’s sister,” she said next day to George Berkeley; “ it has pleased her very much. Mr. Crofton is very fond of his

sister. Her name is Lucy—such a pretty name!"

Did George Berkeley look as if he had ever heard before in his life of this sister of whom Edward Crofton was very fond?

CHAPTER VIII.

"MR. PRESTON," said Agnes Spencer, one day, to Barker Preston, when she was again at Digby Manor, "I wish to drive to that pretty point of view you once showed to Lucy Crofton and me. There was a great deal I saw that day, but a great deal I missed. I think I should see it more clearly now."

"Certainly," said Mr. Preston, "it is a perfect day; only Miss Crofton is not here, you know."

"Quite true," said Agnes, with a little amused smile, but adding, in an odd, dry way, "She often sees and scrutinizes what I wish to look at! She knows it by heart!"

"No! really?" said Barker Preston. "Miss Crofton seldom comes so far from home."

"Ah! you are short-sighted," said Agnes, in rather a mocking tone. "Miss Crofton sees farther than you."

"Ah, yes! it is quite true, indeed, that Miss Crofton sees and knows everything, and does everything well; and I am, as you say, too stupid to compare with her!" said Barker Preston, with a sigh.

"I did *not* say anything of the sort!" said Agnes, merrily laughing, with a revival of her good humour. "You do a great many things well, Mr. Preston; and, above all, the part of *cicerone*. So let us set off. Mrs. Digby has ordered the carriage for us, and here is little Francis Digby dying to be our companion."

And the drive was settled.

It was May—the merry month of May—and the air was as full of flowery fragrance, and sounds of jovial birds, and the eyes were greeted with as much of verdure, and as many hovering, flickering butterflies, and darting swallows, and golden cow-slips, and blue hyacinths, and delicately-green forest trees, as May could desire; and Agnes Spencer, for a time, seemed to have imbibed the gaiety and frolic of the child-like May-time, as she leant back in the pony phaeton, laughing and talking gaily to Mr. Barker Preston, or to the little Francis Digby who was seated with her.

They were driving towards the spot where,

some years back, she had driven with Lucy Crofton, and had vainly tried to get into Hulse House. Why go there now? What was her object? What if she saw Arthur Colville? It was not very likely that she would dare to brave a meeting and a scene in the presence of Barker Preston, and the little cousin of the Digbys whom she had brought with her.

"We will not try to get into the grounds to-day," she said, as they drew near the Lodge at Hulse, where they had held the parley before. "Have you seen Mr. Colville yet?" she added, rather stiffly. Mr. Preston was just then thinking of Lucy Crofton's pale face and Mr. Colville's visits to the Parsonage, so he sighed, and said, very sorrowfully, "*No, I never see him.*"

"*You never do! but who does then?*" said Agnes sharply.

"The Parsonage," was Barker Preston's reply in a deep voice. He had an objection to saying Miss Crofton.

"The Parsonage!" said Agnes, laughing. "The Parsonage! The trees see him! The wooded hill looks quietly at him, and waves her hundred branches over him! The flowery valley gazes at him from below, the sky looks down on him, the moon smiles softly at him, the stars

twinkle their laughing eyes at him—but what, who at the Parsonage sees him?" Agnes went on thus, half soliloquising, as if amusing herself by dreaming on, caring little what Mr. Preston thought, or perhaps forgetting him.

"Oh! Miss Spencer, you go on just like a book I took up the other day," said Barker Preston at last, "so that I hardly know what I was going to say, because the stars, and the moon, and all that, remind me of—of".....he hesitated a little, and then said, in a subdued voice—"I just meant Miss Crofton."

"Ah!" said Agnes, maliciously. Then, as if angry with herself, she said kindly, "I am sure Mr. Colville will do well if he sees Miss Crofton. We all of us do well when we are under her influence. You and I are lucky, Mr. Preston, to have such a friend."

Whilst Agnes Spencer's voice subsided to the calm, steady tone in which these last words were uttered, something made Barker Preston keep his eyes firmly fixed on the road before him for two or three minutes after she had ceased speaking, whilst a curious mist prevented him from seeing very distinctly the ponies he was so carefully driving. At last he lifted up his head, and said—

"These are a capital pair of ponies, Miss Spencer."

"Yes," said the little boy, who thought he had found a good opportunity for displaying some newly acquired knowledge; "Tom says that off one is the best trotter anywhere, and papa says I am to have one just like it when I come from school. But Miss Spencer, you know, when you ride with me we may canter, for ladies always canter, though our horses ought to trot. Oh! but look, Miss Spencer! just look at that gentleman coming. What a splendid horse! he will be here soon. Do look! on my side, Miss Spencer."

"Stop!" said Agnes, in a shrill, unnatural tone of command to Mr. Preston, as if she had not listened to what the child had been saying. "Stop! I wish to get out here. I knew it!" she added, in a low voice, as if speaking to herself, "I knew it."

At the word of command Barker Preston stopped the carriage, not a little wondering at the whims and authoritative airs of his dear Miss Spencer, but very willing to humour her and to obey her. As little Francis jumped out and presented his arm to help Miss Spencer, as he thought manlike, the rider drew nearer. Agnes laid her hand on the

child's arm, and grasped it—she little knew how strongly.

" You hurt me, Miss Spencer !" he cried out. Her hold relaxed, but she did not move till the rider had passed. Either his horse started at the carriage, or the gentleman had spurred it on, for just as it went by, the horse plunged.

" By Jove !" said Barker Preston, turning round to Agnes, " it is Mr. Colville ! "

" It is *not* Mr. Colville," said Agnes, her eyes flashing, and speaking sternly, almost fiercely, " it is *not* Mr. Colville !" and then, as if ashamed and alarmed at her own petulance, she leant against the carriage as if exhausted ; but after a few minutes, during which Barker Preston was looking after the horseman, and watching with some anxiety the spirited animal, which was galloping on very furiously, she roused herself, and said quietly, " Yes, you are right, no doubt ; but let us drive on, for I am too tired to walk. Get in, Francis."

" That horse goes furiously, but he is a first-rate rider, he can manage any animal," said Barker Preston, and so he turned contentedly to the pretty pair of ponies, and was driving on when Agnes called out,

"Do turn back again, Mr. Preston; I am too much tired to go farther to-day."

"Another whim," thought Barker Preston, but he good-humouredly obeyed.

"Should not I like such a fine horse as that," said the little boy, "I wonder who he is! how his horse galloped and plunged! but he is a capital horseman, as Mr. Preston says—I will be if I can."

And so he went on chattering, not finding out, perhaps, that his companion was very silent, and Mr. Preston even was musing.

They had gone about a mile on their way towards home, when Mr. Preston was startled by seeing a saddled horse without a rider feeding near the road. He said nothing, and Agnes was so deep in thought, that she did not notice the creature till close to it, and then in full view of them lay something on the ground—a dark object.

Francis exclaimed, "That's the horse, Miss Spencer. Oh, Miss Spencer! it is—it is! it is his horse! and there he lies—there he lies. He is thrown! he is killed! oh, he is killed!"

Barker Preston thought he never should forget the next sound that struck on his ear—a shrill, piercing scream from Agnes, and an exclamation

as if wrung from the very anguish of her heart,
“ I have killed him ! I have killed him !”

The carriage was stopped ; the dark object was the form of Mr. Colville lying insensible on the ground. There was much blood, but it was only from a slight wound on the forehead, which had bled profusely.

CHAPTER IX.

IT was late in the afternoon of that day that Walter Crofton was summoned from the drawing-room at the Parsonage, to speak to Barker Preston, who was waiting outside. He looked pale and agitated.

“ Mr. Colville has been thrown from his horse ; he is insensible,” were Barker Preston’s first hurried words. “ We have carried him to Watson’s farm ; Miss Spencer is there ; she entreats you and Miss Crofton to come immediately, if possible ; she wishes him to be brought here. Can you come ? I borrowed Watson’s horse, and now I must go for the doctor, and gallop back as fast as I can. May I say you are coming ?”

“ Yes, yes ; the moment the carriage is ready,” was the reply, and Barker Preston hurried off. All was quickly arranged. After a consultation with Mrs. Walter as to the preparation of a

room for Mr. Colville, Walter turned eagerly to Lucy.

“Lucy, can you come with me?” he said.

“Yes, yes! was her agitated exclamation; “Agnes will want my help!” and Mrs. Walter echoed the “yes,” and speeded their going.

And at last they were on the road. Should they find Mr. Colville alive? Agnes was most at Lucy’s heart in that interminable drive—Arthur Colville, still an unbeliever, at Walter’s.

At length they reached the roadside farm where Colville lay; he was alive, but still insensible. Agnes was there; she was calm, self-possessed, and considerate. There was one vivid flush of colour on her face as she first saw Walter and Lucy. She grasped Walter’s hand, and there was a convulsive catching at her breath for an instant, as she half whispered, “I have killed him! it was my doing!” Then she was calm and pale as before; all emotion was repressed; she arranged everything with Walter. The moment the doctor and Barker Preston returned, Barker Preston was to drive back the pony phaeton with little Francis to Digby Manor, and explain to the Digbys the reason for her absence.

She had sent a labourer express to break the intelligence to Hodson, and to summon him to

attend his master, and at length Hodson arrived. Agnes Spencer had often seen him in by-gone years, and as the favourite servant of his master, and a person of unusual intelligence and refinement of mind, Agnes had frequently talked to him—more as a friend than as a servant—but now there was no comment, no exclamation, not a word of recognition—both were too fully engrossed with the same absorbing anxiety, to think of the strangeness of their meeting.

Mr. Colville was removed in the Croftons' carriage, with the doctor and Hodson to the Parsonage; whilst another vehicle belonging to the farmer, conveyed Walter, Agnes, and Lucy. And so the melancholy cavalcade set out, and Mr. Colville, still insensible, was safely landed at the Croftons, and carried to the spare room prepared for him. No one of that party of watchers as yet knew whether he would ever return from it in life.

Hours passed, and Agnes was there watching. She was safe whilst Mr. Colville was insensible—she could watch; but if he recovered, she must be again banished. Look your last, Agnes Spencer. Look at him whose life you have blighted, and whom at last you have killed. Yes! I have killed him! were the words kneaded into her brain: it seemed to her, as if all she saw and heard, resolved

itself into those words, “ I have killed him !” and they were the first, as we know, that she had uttered to Walter and Lucy, “ I have killed him—it was my doing !”

For a few hours, Agnes was allowed to watch with the medical man. It was not in vain ; Mr. Colville moved. Agnes was first pale, then, as once before, a brilliant flush spread over her face. Colville spoke. She alone heard his words ; he unclosed his eyes, he saw her, he smiled ; it was the sweet smile once habitual to his face. “ Yes, Agnes, you !” he murmured ; then sank again, but Agnes could have lived through days of torture for such words, and such a smile as this.

But a desolating blank followed : there was doubt of his recovery—there was doubt of his sanity if he recovered. Then came some hope as to his life, and as to his intellect. Then came absence of all fear as to either.

And then came to Agnes that which she had told herself must come—she must again be banished from the presence of her lover. It was arranged that she should lodge at a farm-house not far from the Parsonage during this time of anxiety. Common prudence dictated the necessity for saving Mr. Colville in his present critical state, from the agitation of seeing her. The secret of her former en-

gagement to Colville had been at once entrusted to Walter; but to those who like Barker Preston knew nothing of her extreme anxiety and distress were perplexing. Barker Preston could not think why Miss Spencer should fret herself so much, and look as white as a ghost, and take it into her head that it was her fault, when she had no more to do with it than he or little Francis Digby had.

But Mrs. Walter, who was equally ignorant of the truth, chose to see nothing unnatural in Miss Spencer's distress, or in her wish to stay and see the end of it. Although Barker Preston most stoutly denied it, Mrs. Walter was certain that Agnes had in some way caused the accident, for so she herself had said over and over again, and surely she must know best. Mrs. Walter must own that she had a high regard for Miss Spencer, who had treated her with peculiar confidence, speaking to her alone, and begging her as a particular favour never to mention her name in Mr. Colville's presence, or to let him know that she had caused the accident. How then could Barker Preston be so obstinate and impertinent as to contradict her?

CHAPTER X.

CONSCIOUSNESS at last returned, and a smile of pleasure gleamed over Mr. Colville's face as he first saw Walter Crofton.

"I can't remember how it is I am here," he whispered : "but it is kind, very kind of you, to have me with you," and he stretched out his hand to Walter, and uttered a feeble "thank you" to Mrs. Walter's remark that she was very glad to have him under their roof.

How strange was the life at Hulse Parsonage during those days of suspense, and how little did Mr. Colville guess what anxious hearts had been watching over him. Out of that set of watchers Agnes Spencer alone could never see his look of gratitude in returning consciousness, nor hear his voice again ! The one who shared most nearly in her anxiety was William Hodson, Arthur Colville's faithful servant and friend. His manner to Walter

Crofton and Lucy was full of the most heartfelt respect and gratitude.

"Ah! sir," he said to Walter, "if my master lives, your kindness may be the means of restoring him to his better self."

But Hodson's manner towards Agnes was very different. Mixed with the habitual outward respect of a well-trained servant, there was a look of stern disapproval on his countenance whenever his eyes rested on her, and if she spoke to him, he answered coldly and shortly. At times it seemed as if Agnes noticed it and shrank under it: at others as if her proud spirit chafed at it, and she held her head higher, and gave an order authoritatively; but then, again, her lip quivered, and she bowed her head as if in sharp pain at the unexpressed rebuke conveyed by Hodson's manner. Arthur Colville lay there—killed by her—or so it might have been: his life blighted by her. That quiet, displeased look of Hodson's said words like these to her heart, for she knew what none besides did, that she had in reality been the cause of the accident.

Arthur Colville's eyes had met hers as he passed the carriage; he had violently spurred his horse; Agnes had not then thought of the plunging, terrified animal; she thought only of Colville's look of

angry recognition ; but now she understood it. Yes ; she would have been his murderer had he died of that fall. Hodson little knew how she writhed under his displeasure. She was sometimes tempted to throw off all reserve, and to cry out in the agony of her own reproving conscience, and ask forgiveness from him for the wrong done by her to the being they both loved best on earth.

That was a period of great self-conflict. Proud, excitable, and impetuous, Agnes had to endure the cold sluggishness of quiet watching and waiting, and patience was a hard virtue to a spirit like hers —foaming, and sparkling, and longing to burst from its restraints. But was not this given in mercy ? She had time to probe her own heart—time to look in and on—on *in* life, on *after* life. This eager impatient spirit had never known self-restraint. Restraint was now imposed upon it.

And so the days passed, and Arthur Colville was recovering ; and Agnes must not venture again to the Parsonage.

She had now to wait out of sight, sick at heart, almost hopeless ! Her face showed the wear and tear of such sickness of heart, and Lucy, who watched it with deep and painful anxiety, determined to make an effort for her the moment there was the slightest opening for attempting it.

Mr. Colville was moved to the drawing-room. He was just able to talk a little without much fatigue. Lucy happened to be alone with him for a short time on the following day : he spoke to her of one or two of his workpeople, and then he was silent, his face looking calm and almost happy.

“ The cottagers are anxious about you,” said Lucy. “ You have been very kind to many of them.”

“ I wished it,” said Mr. Colville, “ but not as I ought.”

“ You have a friend who is also anxious,” said Lucy, in as steady a voice as she could command.

“ A friend !” said Mr. Colville, hastily, in a voice of much agitation and annoyance, whilst a flush came over his face. “ You forget, Miss Crofton, I have no friends !” and his voice fell, as if too weak for the exertion either of excitement or contradiction. Lucy saw that there would be danger in continuing the subject.

“ Will you not let us be called friends, then ?” she said gently.

Mr. Colville looked up ; he seemed relieved by her words, and said, “ I mistook you. My head is still confused. Yes, you are true friends—the only true ones—friends of the poor, miserable recluse.”

Lucy said no more : the time to speak of Agnes must evidently be delayed.

And now I must go back to the old Baronial Hall. When Mr. Colville's accident happened, Edward Crofton was with the Raymonds. Mrs. Walter wrote to tell him of it, and she enlarged, in rather a mysterious manner, on Lucy's deep concern for their unhappy neighbour. Parts of the letter were read aloud. It so chanced that George Berkeley was present : he was not thought of, as the subject was dwelt upon with much interest ; but a look of pain passed over his face, and he was soon walking alone in the woods that formed the boundary of the two estates. That evening his mother upbraided him in querulous tones for being very late, and having made her suffer all sorts of nervous fancies.

" My dear mother, there is nothing to fancy," said he.

" Oh! George, you don't know the horrors of nervousness ! I fancied everything."

" And yet not the truth !" he said, in a dry half-satirical tone.

But George Berkeley was soon again the sociable companion to his invalid mother ; and at the end of the evening, as she slowly walked to her room,

supported by the strong arm of her handsome, clever son, she had forgotten her nervous fears and pettishness.

"Yes, George! yours is a strong and a loving arm to help me. Good-night, and God bless you, my dear boy. What should I do without you?"

Worldly as she was, Mrs. Berkeley had a warm heart for those she loved, and there was a charm few could resist in her winning yet selfish idolatry. Her son did not resist it; his kiss was hearty and sincere, and his face glowed, his lips curled into a loving smile, and his eyes looked tenderly into those of his mother as he bid her good-night. And yet although he was not aware of the full extent of the mischief she had done, he knew that she had given the first wound to his happiness.

CHAPTER XI.

THE days went on sadly at Hulse Parsonage. Lucy saw the pale, careworn face of Agnes, the languid eye, the heavy step, and she could give no help ; there was nothing yet but patience ; but at last there seemed an opening to mention her ; for one day, as Mr. Colville was getting stronger, he said rather abruptly to Lucy, who was alone with him in the drawing-room,

“ When I was at the worst, Miss Crofton, was there not some one—some one near me besides yourselves ? ”

Lucy hesitated a moment, and then thought it better to speak the truth.

“ Yes,” she said, quietly and distinctly, “ there was.”

Mr. Colville said no more ; he closed his eyes, and lay for some time on the sofa without moving or speaking.

Lucy could not interpret his silence. He did not rouse himself; he seemed languid, and unequal to any conversation. Her sister-in-law came in, and Lucy dared not try to force the subject again upon him.

The glow of a summer's day was on the woods and lawns of Hulse, and on the garden at the Parsonage, when Arthur Colville was carried out of doors for the first time. Hodson lifted him out, and watched him as tenderly as if he had been a favourite child.

The green leaves were just moved by the gentle summer breeze, there was the sound of birds, the hum of insects, the scent of flowers, the distant rippling of water: all these had a charm, such as the convalescent only can fully appreciate.

Arthur Colville looked around him. A feeling of gratitude swelled at his heart. What was it, and to whom? He could not well have answered, but he suddenly remembered words heard in childhood, and now but vaguely recalled, but they seemed to express what was at his heart. “Praise the Lord, O my soul.” Yes, it was to God—God alone, that he could offer praise and thanks, and at that moment he did offer them!

He had been in danger, and in suffering, and he was restored; he had a feeling of enjoy-

ment upon him as he lay there amongst the beautiful things of nature. Did he deserve it? No: a sense of sin and of undeservedness for that moment swept over his soul, and he could have cried out "God be merciful to me a sinner!" Yes, for that short space of time he was a believer and a penitent; but the sensation, and it was no more, soon left him.

"You are too busy, to be often at home," he said, in a querulous tone, to Walter Crofton, when he joined him soon afterwards; "the privilege of being your patient is at an end."

"You were too weak to send me away, or to do without me at first," said Walter, laughing.

"I am too weak to do without you still, Mr. Crofton!" was the answer.

"Do you like being read to?" said Walter, in his blunt, half abstracted manner.

"No—yes," said Colville; "it depends on the reader and on the book. But why? Have you found a reader for me?"

"Only Lucy or me. Lucy said—and I forgot it till now—that she thought it would be good for you to be read to sometimes."

"It will be very good for me," said Colville. "The readers in this case decide the question. But I could not ask it. Miss Crofton cannot really

think of giving up any time to me, nor you either any longer."

"Lucy is always glad to be useful," said Walter, in his matter-of-fact manner; "and, as for me, it is my business. I only wish I could perform it more skilfully."

"Miss Walcott," said Barker Preston one day, about a week after Mr. Colville's accident, when he had sat with her for a few minutes, "Miss Walcott, I have been thinking a good deal."

"I am glad to hear it," was muttered, as parenthesis, by the little lady.

"I have been thinking a good deal," he continued, "about people falling from their horses."

"A very natural thought," chimed in Miss Walcott again; "as our neighbour at the large house has just done it."

"That's exactly it!" exclaimed Mr. Preston, briskly. "Miss Walcott, you are so quick, that you see what one's thinking of before one has said it! Now, I am very sorry for Mr. Colville."

"Very natural and proper too," said Miss Walcott; "but they say he is getting better."

"Yes, better! likely enough!" said Preston. That's it! What do you say to nursing men when they fall off their horses?" looking doubtfully at Miss Walcott.

"Very glad when they are well nursed, and hope they will soon be well again," said Miss Walcott.

"Mr. Colville could not be better nursed," said Barker Preston, "and no doubt he will soon get well again; but I do not quite see why he should have Miss Crofton to nurse him."

"Miss Crofton! Lucy Crofton! What is she nursing him for?" exclaimed the little lady sharply. "What is she nursing him for?"

"That's just what I have been thinking all this time," said Barker Preston. "What is she nursing him for, and why is not he moved back to his own home? Mrs. Walter goes on telling me, 'Here is Mr. Colville, you see, Mr. Preston; and I am come to speak to you, Mr. Preston, whilst Lucy stays with poor Mr. Colville.' You see, Miss Walcott, that's it!"

Miss Walcott gave an angry little "hem" and a short bleat. "One of Mrs. Walter's schemes," she said, very tartly; then added, "Mr. Preston, you and I don't govern the parish—and very lucky for the parish that we don't; and all we have to do is to mind our own concerns. Nursing—fiddlesticks! Why could not that chattering woman keep him to herself, or wrap him up and send him home! Fiddlesticks—nursing! Why could he not stick on his horse like any other man?"

What is the use of seclusion if you can't keep your tumbles to yourself? Now, Barker Preston, don't come gossipping to me about other people's concerns. Thinking, indeed! What's the use of thinking, if it is only such thoughts as these? Read *Beauty and the Beast*, and think of that! Nursing!—very right and kind of Lucy Crofton, too. I never said it was not. Lucy is sure to do right! But I am very sorry for Mr. Colville, Barker Preston," the little lady added, "but let us speak no more about it! How is your father? and how does your hot-house go on? Nursing, indeed! Why does not Mrs. Walter wrap him up, and send him home?"

CHAPTER XII.

“ How did you know of my accident ? ” said Mr. Colville one day to Walter Crofton and Lucy. “ What brought me here ? I have too long a memory in some respects ”—he sighed—“ but something strange has happened to it of late. I have no recollection of my accident or its antecedents.”

Walter looked as foolish and uncomfortable at Mr. Colville’s question, as might be expected from a straightforward, honest man, suddenly placed under the necessity for concealing the truth. Like other men in dilemmas, he shifted the trouble and responsibility on the weaker sex. He was silent, whilst his eyes appealed to Lucy to answer Mr. Colville’s question.

“ You were riding,” she said ; “ your horse started, as we believe, and threw you, and you were seen by a neighbour of ours, Mr. Barker Preston.”

Mr. Colville looked at Lucy gravely. His look seemed to her like a reproach for evading the truth. He went on musing for awhile, and then said—

“Memory is a strange puzzle. But I would rather be told no more,” he added, rather hastily. “It is enough to know that you came to the rescue ;” and one of his sweet smiles for an instant gleamed over his countenance, as he looked at Walter and Lucy.

Walter found a book to which Mr. Colville liked to listen, and Lucy left them together. Agnes met her, as she went towards the house where she was lodging. Her eyes always sought in Lucy’s face for the answer to the hopes which had been occupying her during her absence. She seldom spoke her question, but the paler cheek, the contracted brow, told what a heavy answer was conveyed to her by Lucy’s silence.

“Mr. Preston has been here, Lucy,” she said ; “he is not happy about you.”

“Not happy about me !” said Lucy, “and why ?”

Agnes tried to laugh ; it would not do ! she did not attempt to say anything more ; but she was soon locked in her own room, battling against the storm that raged in her heart.

And Arthur Colville, what were his thoughts when Walter Crofton left him that day, and he, too, was alone ! All remembrance of his accident, it was true, had left his mind, but there was another remembrance vividly before him. For some time he had thought it was a dream ; but Lucy Crofton's words, in answer to the question he had longed to ask, ever since he became fully conscious, had changed that belief into another. The dream had seemed to him unutterably beautiful, but when he knew that it was a reality there was terror, and anger, and misery, in the thought of it. As a dream, it had been Agnes Spencer as he had loved her with all the ardour of his first boyish passion—free from the deep faults of which her own foolish conduct, but still more the malicious inventions of the traitorous Douglas Treeby, had made him suppose her guilty. And was it true, then, that guilty as she was, she had dared to obtrude herself into his presence ? Had she dared to fancy that he could still love her ?—that he could again forgive her ?

Passion and pride held their fierce dominion over Mr. Colville's heart. He had no sense of guilt for not forgiving the sins of others ; anger raged in his breast—untamed anger—and yet the very strength of his indignation and bitterness .

arose from unsubdued love. In fancy, Agnes often stood before him—the tones of her voice haunted him; in the summer evening, as the trees waved gently in the breeze, there were catches of words, expressions, looks of hers that seemed borne to him by the soft luxuriousness of the air. The witchery of her laugh seemed as if still ringing in his ears—nay, the very touch of her hand, as it used to rest in his, seemed present with him. How could he fight against these sweet memories? He would waywardly retain and court them for a time, and luxuriate in fond recollections—putting aside the truth that he might give way to so enchanting an illusion. But then followed the punishment for these moments of self-indulgent weakness: having wrought out all the sweetness of this intoxication of love, the anguish of knowing that it was lost for ever came upon him with tenfold bitterness.

It was after such an hour of enervating indulgence in tender recollections, that Lucy Crofton one day joined him in the drawing-room. Agnes was obliged to leave Hulse the next morning, to attend her father. She had lingered on, vainly hoping for that summons which each day and hour rendered less probable and more desired; and Lucy prepared herself to make a last attempt to speak of

her to Mr. Colville before she left the neighbourhood. Lucy began by reading a few passages out of a book which Mr. Colville had wished to hear, and he listened, as a matter of civility ; but she read, and as it were mechanically—for the thoughts of both were preoccupied. She finished ; he made a slight comment ; he was cold and indifferent.

But Lucy must speak ; it was better for Agnes not to leave them with any uncertainty on her mind, as to the chance of her lover being restored to her.

“ You asked me once,” said Lucy, “ whether any one visited you in your illness. You have not asked me again who the person was. Do you wish to know ?”

Lucy fancied that Mr. Colville must hear the beating of her heart, so strong and articulate, as it seemed to her, was every throb when she had uttered those words. Mr. Colville’s face became very pale : Lucy saw his hands convulsively moving. He spoke at last, but it was in a hoarse, unnatural voice.

“ Miss Crofton, I do not wish to be told.” He stopped, and then added, as if the excitement of anger gave him strength, “ I repeat, I do *not* wish to be told. Whoever it was who dared to

force herself into my presence, it was ill-advised and ill-done. There are circumstances of my past life it is unwise to look back upon. They must not—nay, more, they *shall not* be revived.” He paused again, then added slowly and distinctly, “There can be nothing but misery for that person in seeing again one who may forget, but will never forgive!”

He stopped speaking, he stood up ; he forgot his weakness—for got that he had scarcely walked without help since his accident ; he strode up and down the room.

It was a terrible sight. His face pale, his lips moving as if muttering in hot passion words that he dare not utter—his tall figure bent with weakness, thin and gaunt from illness, supported alone by the excitement of anger. He paused at last, and said, “I am sorry if I have given you pain, Miss Crofton.”

“ You have pained me,” said Lucy, in a low and quiet voice, but with such calm reproof and sorrow in the tone, that it arrested Mr. Colville’s attention. He looked at her, he sat down, he was silent for some time.

“ Yes,” he said at length, “ this is inexcusable in your eyes, and I would apologise if I knew how.”

His manner was hard and dry ; there was more composure in it, but there was pride, and almost defiance.

Lucy had not spoken : she did not wish to do so. "One who may forget, but will never forgive !" were the words ringing in her ears. They had a frightful import to one who prayed daily to forgive as she hoped to be forgiven ; and as Mr. Colville, with something more of his natural manner, made some commonplace remark, she answered coldly, got up, said she must go out to visit some poor neighbours, and without giving him the opportunity of speaking again, she left the room.

Alone, safe away from the unhappy recluse, and secure from intrusion in a favourite dell, which she usually crossed in her way to the farm-house where Agnes lodged, she sat on the grass, and rested her aching head on her hands, and let her tears flow to relieve the agitation and horror of her mind. Yes, it was *horror* at the fearful words of never-ending anger and unforgettingness she had just heard from one who had so much need of forgiveness himself.

She must soon be calm—she must prepare herself to meet Agnes—she must tell her the truth. Arthur Colville was unworthy. Would Agnes feel anything of the repugnance which she could not

help experiencing for one who could utter such words as those which were now resting heavily on her heart?

Lucy reached the farm. She went at once to Agnes, who was to set off early the next day.

Strong religious principle—that was to Arthur Colville but a fanciful chimera, to Agnes an uncertain, fluctuating sentiment—was to Lucy a steadfast, unfailing guide and support; and with this help she was able to speak and act in the best and most judicious way, although, alas! nothing could take away the sting from what she had to relate; and it was in deep sorrow that Agnes Spencer left Hulse the next morning.

Mr. Colville was now sufficiently recovered to bear the removal from the Parsonage, and he once more returned to his gloomy home. Walter Crofton went to visit him as often as possible. Arthur Colville had not dared to speak of Lucy for some days. At length he said, “I hope Miss Crofton is well?”

“Yes, thank you,” was Walter’s short reply.

Mr. Colville looked for a moment inquiringly at him, and then said no more; but there was an expression of pain and wounded pride on his countenance. The conversation flagged; and as Walter

had other parishioners to attend, he soon left Mr. Colville alone.

Yes, that was indeed alone ! Never had Colville felt more desolate, more sensible of solitude, more yearning after communion with others than when · Walter Crofton left him that day. He was still weak, his head unfitted for reading, his nerves shaken, and he was alone ! there was a dull dreariness in those words that he had scarcely ever so fully realised before.

Lucy Crofton had forsaken him. Half unconsciously to himself, in her a new interest in life had sprung up ; he had cared for her sympathy, he had taken pleasure in hearing her opinions, he was glad when their sentiments agreed, he was pleased that she should approve of what he said and thought, but she had forsaken him ! and there was a whisper at his heart that he deserved it. He could not forget the calm reproof of her look and manner, as she said, “ You *have* pained me.” Her manner had been entirely changed to him from that moment. She had never come to the room to talk or read to him as before. There was serious displeasure marked by this tacit renunciation. Yes, and he *deserved* it.

The day darkened around him, as he sat alone in the large library at Hulse ; he mused and pon-

dered ; the dusk twisted all the objects in the room into strange shapes ; his fancy invested them with something of connection with his thoughts. They seemed like gloomy likenesses of friends he had lived amongst years ago ; each form had sadness and pain impressed upon it ; phantoms of gay, happy companions hovered around him, now looking grim and sorrow-stricken, as a necessary consequence of friendship with himself. But out of this confused mass of objects, two, prominent in pain and in gloom, were ever nearest to him : one the friend of his boyhood, the traitor, the forger ; the other, Agnes Spencer, the heartless trifler with his best and strongest affections.

CHAPTER XIII.

WHEN, for the first time after his return to that old grim gray-chimneyed house which had again enclosed his spirit, Arthur Colville walked feebly into the drawing-room at the Parsonage, his eye glanced quickly at Lucy, though his first words were for Mrs. Crofton. He simply, but warmly expressed his gratitude for the kindness shown him during his illness. Mrs. Crofton had more of easy friendliness in her manner than usual. She had really felt anxious for Mr. Colville, and she spoke kindly and shook his hand heartily.

Mr. Colville looked gratified. He then turned to Lucy. There was more stiffness and distant courtesy in his manner, as in a few well chosen words he added his thanks to her. But there was a little emphasis on the words that spoke of the past, as if intending to mark that he expected no continuance of her kind interest. Lucy shook

hands, and she thought there was no want of friendliness in her manner: the shock she had felt was no reason for discontinuing all intercourse with him, and she intended to treat him with her usual civility. She did not know how much her manner was an index of her feelings; there was quiet reproof in her look and tone of voice, which Mr. Colville deeply felt, and when he returned to his lonely home he had gained a lesson, although it was one self applied.

How was it that he, the once agreeable man of fashion, courted, admired, and perhaps beloved in the world, should thus shrink abashed before the unspoken rebuke of a gentle person like Lucy? Was it Lucy, or was it conscience speaking through her, that thus affected him? Mr. Colville thought much as he slowly rode home that day. The result was another visit to the Parsonage before the week was over. He must see Lucy Crofton alone. Mrs. Walter seemed to have divined his wishes.

“Can you walk much at present?” she said to him, in her blandest manner. “If you are equal to it, I am sure you would like to see how much our beds of geranium are improved. Lucy would show them to you with pleasure.”

Lucy’s face was appealed to by Mr. Colville

with a quiet, anxious scrutiny. Lucy felt that she blushed, in the consciousness that her pleasure was not what it would have been before she had listened to Mr. Colville's unforgiving speech. Mr. Colville hesitated, and looked more openly at Lucy as he said—

"I fear it will be too much trouble for Miss Crofton."

"Oh! not in the least—not in the least," said Mrs. Walter briskly, before Lucy had time to say "yes" or "no." "Lucy, put on your bonnet. You can take Mr. Colville to the large elm tree, and then you know, Mr. Colville can rest there."

Lucy said "Very well."

Mr. Colville wished he could have gleaned from those simple words and the quiet way in which they were uttered anything as to Lucy's liking or disliking of the office imposed on her. She soon returned—how pretty and graceful in her walking dress Mr. Colville probably did not observe. Her beauty had, perhaps, unconsciously helped to gain an influence over him, but it was her higher qualities—above all, her strong religious principles—which had won for her a power over his wayward nature, such as even Agnes herself had scarcely exercised.

Mrs. Walter Crofton was not a dull woman in

some matters, and she was right when she thought that Mr. Colville was on the high road to falling in love with Lucy. "How will it end?" she thought to herself as they left the room together.

They sat down under the spreading elm tree; they admired the flowers—they spoke on indifferent subjects. Now this ceased. Arthur Colville spoke.

"Miss Crofton, you are displeased with me. I have lost whatever I had gained, small as it was, of your friendly interest. What is worse, I know that I have deserved it."

Lucy looked at him with a frank, kindly expression of satisfaction.

"To know we are wrong is half way towards becoming right," she said, with a smile such as she could not have given him a little while before. Mr. Colville's colour came; his eyes flashed with momentary pleasure.

"No," he said; "I am not half, nor a quarter on my way to becoming what *you* would call right. All I lay claim to is the knowledge that I am wrong and the sense to regret it. But as I am, will you forgive me for having pained you?" and he uttered those last words as if there was still pain to him in remembering the way in which Lucy had spoken them. But he added, in a lighter tone, "I do not like your disapproval,

and I have just wit enough left to see when I have fallen under it."

"Yes," said Lucy, in her quiet, marked way.
"You have too much wit."

Mr. Colville smiled. "How do you mean?"

"I was thinking of truer sayings than we could invent," said she, gravely. "But," she added, slightly laughing, "you have too much cleverness to understand me."

"What if I do understand you!" said Mr. Colville, his eyes again brightening. "What if I could quote to you many passages showing that *the wisdom of man is foolishness with God?*"

Lucy turned to him, and pleasure gleamed in her eyes as she read his meaning.

The conversation continued, and Mr. Colville went home with something of the weight taken off his mind; a little light had pushed itself in.

CHAPTER XIV.

IT was late in the summer. The London season was almost over. I heard of Agnes Spencer during that season. She went out as usual to please her father, and she was to be seen at most of the large London parties; and when Mr. Spencer was near, she made an effort to talk and laugh gaily. But I never shall forget the description I received of her sorrow-stricken face as she let herself sink at times into fits of abstraction. Her beauty was more striking than ever; the bright colour that had been habitual to her was succeeded by a transparent paleness; sometimes giving place to a delicate hectic flush. There was a restless, anxious look in her dark eyes, or an intense mournfulness, as for moments together she seemed quite lost to what was going on around her. I was told with what a pained look of interest Mr. Fitzgerald watched her, at these times of abstraction,

when she was, as she thought, unobserved by any one.

“Devonshire, how beautiful it is!” she exclaimed one day as she sat at breakfast with her father in their large London house, after reading a letter from Mrs. Berkeley, dated *Linedon, North Devon*.

“Let us go there!” said Mr. Spencer.

“Go there?” her face brightened, she smiled without effort. She felt as if London and London society suffocated her. If she could get away—if she could get into that lovely scenery, where she had been very happy years ago, she could breathe freely—she could be almost happy again!

So it was settled—to Devonshire they went—to the romantic, rocky, woody watering-place of Linedon. Mr. Spencer must return to London, but he established Agnes to his heart’s content; the colour came to her cheeks, her eyes brightened, and Mr. Spencer went back to his office work with the belief that his darling treasure had no malady more incurable than the want of fresh air. The sound of the waves—the smell of the short turf—the bleating of the wild mountain sheep, came to his mind with much satisfaction as he settled himself to sleep in the very different atmosphere of his London home on his return. He dreamt of Agnes with the rosy cheeks of a farmer’s daughter, and

thought he was the farmer himself, and that the cows were bellowing loudly to be turned into a luscious green field, when he awoke, and found his valet blandly informing him that it was time to get up.

But Mr. Spencer reckoned too confidently on the good effects of sea air. Agnes certainly felt better the first day ; there was something reviving in the freshness and freedom of the country. She need not exert to be amusing, and to care for the events of the day : she who cared for nothing but one sad, lonely house—one desolate room—one other room where the words “Agnes, my Agnes !” had been murmured so sweetly in her ears, and then never uttered or felt again !

Agnes walked out where she could hear the waves roaring as they chased one another for ever, and for ever—on and on—breaking and receding over the pebbly beach. That sound seemed to lull her for awhile, but then it made her sad ; it tired her ; it made her nervous ; the noise would not stop. She must go and see Mrs. Berkeley ; the idea of coming to Linedon had arisen because she was there. But Agnes felt chilly—perhaps she had caught cold. She felt too idle to go out. She would wait to see Mrs. Berkeley till the morning. It became dusk ; she did not like the look

of the coming lonely evening. She roused herself; and ringing for her maid, she told her to get ready to walk with her to Mrs. Berkeley's, about half a mile distant.

" You don't seem very well, ma'am," said her maid.

" No. I have caught cold, I suppose," and Agnes shivered. " Never mind, Ward, Mrs. Berkeley will cure me."

" Ah! my dear Agnes, welcome," said Mrs. Berkeley, when she saw her. " My George is away, and I want some one sadly to love and to pet. But you are cold, and you are pale!"

" Yes," said Agnes, in an unusual manner for her; " I am cold and pale, I suppose."

Mrs. Berkeley rang the bell. " Now sit down, Agnes; be obedient. You are not well, and I shall send for my doctor, and you shall not go back to that house of your own, but you shall have my spare room."

Agnes started up. " Oh, no! indeed. I am well. I shall go home, Mrs. Berkeley."

Now she had come out for society, she felt a strong wish to be alone again, and the idea of being ill and *not alone* was terrible to her at the moment. She exerted herself; she talked gaily, and Mrs. Berkeley seemed to be deceived, but she

was not. She told the servant privately, to let the doctor know that she wished to see him. Agnes persisted in going to her own house, but before she had been gone half an hour, a servant came in haste to beg Mrs. Berkeley to send for her doctor. Agnes was very ill.

The mental distress of the last few months had done its work. The struggle to appear as usual, and to go into society for her father's sake, if not for her own, had been too much for her. The struggle was over. She was too ill to think even of her father. She lay in bed regardless of anything for some hours, excepting the fact that exertion was no longer required. She was too languid to sob, as she otherwise would have done, but she need not laugh, or talk, or think what to do: she must rest. But soon it seemed to her as if rest flew from her. All that she had said to Mrs. Berkeley that evening, or Mrs. Berkeley had said to her, was being repeated over and over again, and though she was so tired, she felt she could get no rest till it was finished. So the night passed, and the next day, and the next. Agnes was not unconscious, but the fever ran so high as at times to amount to delirium.

Mrs. Berkeley was still an invalid; she could not watch over Agnes as she wished. She had for

years been as fond of her as of any human being besides herself and her sons. Perhaps her distress at her illness might have a compound of selfish annoyance in it, but this did not appear, and she probably was not aware of it herself. She was deeply grieved, and it is unnecessary to probe into all the causes for her grief.

Agnes was blessed with that unpurchaseable comfort, a good and warmly-attached maid.

"Ward, don't look anxious," Agnes said faintly one day ; "this illness rests me."

"Bless your dear funny ways!" thought Ward, "there is never anything humdrum or disagreeable, but you will make some odd whim of a way to give life to it!—Well, well," she said aloud ; "take your rest in your own way, ma'am, so that you get it somehow."

Agnes was soon asleep, and Ward was relieved to see her eyes close ; but her waking was unsatisfactory. She was very feverish and impatient ; she talked of the Croftons ; she told Ward how earnestly she longed to see Lucy. She knew if Lucy did not come, that Ward would be ill with over-anxiety, and she would never get well unless Lucy came. "But she can't, Ward. You must not send for her. She can't come, she is wanted there."

Day by day the doctor looked more grave, Ward more unhappy, Mrs. Berkeley more anxious; Mr. Spencer was fast bound in London with a fit of the gout, and the worst must be concealed from him.

The fever was in the mind of Agnes, and she could get no relief. With an intensity of desire, she longed to see Lucy Crofton, and yet she did not wish to take her away from Hulse.

Perhaps at that moment Arthur was learning from Lucy how to forgive her. Over and over again her poor troubled mind was at work on this question. What had she done to deserve such continued anger? Flighty, proud, *exigeante* as she had been, were her faults of such a deep dye that they were never to be forgiven? Never! when she was humble, sorrowful, heart-broken?

But as Agnes asked this of herself for the hundredth time, and pride had as often answered that there was bitter injustice in this stern resolution against pardon, a different view of the case suddenly flashed upon her. Her lover might be unjust and unforgiving, but had her faults been against him alone? Wilful, capricious, repining, careless, what were her virtues! Oh! were she to die now, what a burden of sin lay upon her. *Not deserve punishment*

ment ! Oh ! what did she not deserve ! She, to whom had been given intellects above the common stamp, advantages of education, of wealth, of position, of affection ; all, all wasted, misused, ungratefully received ! Head-strong and selfish, what good had she ever done with the talents entrusted to her care ? She groaned aloud in the anguish of thought, and in the most contrite, softened self-upbraiding.

“Oh ! Lucy, Lucy !” she thought, “why are not you here to teach and to help me !”

It was the fourth day of her illness. Mrs. Berkeley sat by her bedside. Why did she start ? Why did a pang shoot through her ? Why did her colour come and go as Agnes spoke half in sleep, half in delirium ?

“Oh ! Lucy, dear Lucy, why don’t you come ? Where is Lucy Crofton ?”

“Miss Spencer is no better,” were the words of the doctor in answer to Mrs. Berkeley’s inquiries that evening.

“Ward,” said Mrs. Berkeley the next day, “who is this friend your mistress raves about ? Where does she live ?”

“It is Miss Lucy Crofton, ma’am. She lives at Hulse near L——.”

Mrs. Berkeley said no more. She walked out

of the room with a slower but a more stately step than usual.

The answer to the inquiry in the morning was, “Miss Spencer is still in danger.”

CHAPTER XV.

IT was a fine October morning. Barker Preston called at Hulse Parsonage just to see how Lucy Crofton looked before he took his ride, but he did not see Lucy.

“Here is a sad piece of business, Mr. Preston,” said Mrs. Walter. “Here was Lucy at home, and Mr. Colville coming frequently; and here is Miss Spencer very ill, and I am sure I am very sorry for her, very; but still it is very unlucky, and Lucy is so unhappy. They want her to set off at once, and Lucy is crying upstairs, and it is a long journey, and altogether.....still I am very sorry for Miss Spencer.”

Barker Preston’s face told his sorrow, but as Mrs. Crofton went on relating the circumstances of the summons, and of Miss Spencer’s illness, no words came, but something between a hem and a groan. He stood looking perplexed and thoroughly cast down; but after taking a brisk turn round the

room, and switching his whip with some vehemence against his boot, he faced Mrs. Walter and said, “It is very bad ;” then started off again round the room, whilst Mrs. Walter went on repeating that she thought Miss Spencer would not recover, and how sad it would be, and that she was sure Lucy would be ill too.

Barker Preston blew his nose in an energetic manner as he paced round the room : then stopped again, facing Mrs. Crofton, and said —

“If I can do anything—anything in the world for either of them, or for anybody, let me know. Good-bye, Mrs. Crofton. I shall call in half an hour to see if I can be of use,” and he was gone. But in less than half an hour he was watching near the Parsonage in the hope of helping some one, if not his dear Miss Lucy herself.

A letter from Miss Spencer’s maid, had brought the news of Agnes’s danger, and of her anxiety to see Lucy ; and with her brother’s and Mrs. Walter’s consent, Lucy set off. She gave a kind look to Barker Preston as she passed him just outside the Parsonage door, returned the hearty pressure of his hand with the kindness his warm sympathy deserved, and left him to wonder why “Some people were so uncommonly like angels, looking so pretty, for all they were so

good, and always remembering to be kind to *everybody*, though they might be always thinking of *somebody*."

The weary journey was over! How many times in fancy and fear had Lucy seen Agnes lying speechless, heard Ward's greeting of "*it is too late*," and then roused herself to think it was needless alarm, and to fancy Agnes sitting up and smiling brightly as she came in.

But now the reality was before her. Ward met her at the door; her face was anxious, but there was a little smile of pleasure at seeing her.

"My lady is no worse; you will be careful to keep her quiet ma'am. She has been longing and longing for you, and Dr. Newton says it is better you should go in at once, just as if you had been with her every day."

And Lucy entered the sick room. It was slightly darkened; but Lucy could see Agnes as she lay on the bed. Her eyes seemed more searching than usual; they watched Lucy from the door to the bedside, and a gleam of satisfaction dilated them more and more as Lucy drew nearer. Agnes stretched out her hand, but could not lift it. Lucy's was gently laid upon it, and she stooped to kiss her. Agnes whispered "Thank you," and smiled; then

said no more. Lucy sat down by her. The face of Agnes assumed a placid expression ; she slept.

When Lucy saw Dr. Newton, the physician who had been summoned from — he told her that there might be weeks of uncertainty, as to the result of the illness, even if Miss Spencer should pass the present crisis.

For some days, there was no important change ; Agnes scarcely spoke, but whenever she saw Lucy, there was an attempt to smile, and sometimes she moved her hand so as to let it rest in her's ; and the feeble pressure told of her comfort in the knowledge that Lucy was with her.

Once she looked earnestly at her and whispered, “ Arthur ? tell me ?”

Lucy answered, “ I have nothing important to tell. There has been no fresh allusion to you, but I see improvement. When you are better, I will tell you every word I can recollect.”

Agnes looked relieved and almost happy ; she said no more. Lucy took a book and sat near the window. With half a smile on her pale thin lips, Agnes fell asleep.

The evening closed in ; still she slept. Lucy moved ; there was something in the heavy sleep, that sent a nameless terror through her ; she stood near the bed, watching Agnes as far as the waning

light would allow. The face was very pale ; could it be paler if death was there ? but Lucy thought she heard the breathing very faintly, unless it was indeed but the echo of her own throbbing pulse. She sat down again ; she would wait ten minutes more. This sleep might be of invaluable importance. Ten minutes passed. Then Lucy could bear the doubt no longer ; she crept gently to the door ; she opened it and asked Ward who had been resting for a few hours in the next room to send for Dr. Newton.

Then the watch began once more. Lucy had seen death but once ; she was not well-versed in its symptoms.

CHAPTER XVI.

MRS. BERKELEY had not been to the house since Lucy's arrival, but she had sent almost every hour with inquiries.

She could not rest; she thought of Agnes, she thought of her own dear George, and of her once half-formed hope, that he and Agnes should become attached to one another; then of her first, her almost constant wish that he should marry Margaret Raymond. Both these hopes were disappointed. Margaret was to be married, and to Lucy Crofton's brother! and Agnes lay there perhaps at the point of death, and Lucy Crofton was the person she raved of night and day! How strangely had circumstances mixed her up with this family; how had they come across her path for good or for evil. The stern worldly-minded woman said to herself that day *for evil*; these Croftons were surely born to be her tormentors!

Distressingly anxious as she was for Agnes, she could not watch beside her, now that this girl must be brought to perplex every movement. What if George should come? To tell him Lucy was there, was but tempting him to renew his attachment, and yet if he came not knowing it!—what was to be done?

Thus she passed the few days after Lucy's arrival; bewildered by the toils her own worldly spirit had drawn around her. There was a knock at the door.

"Come in Arden, what is it?" she said rather imperiously.

"Ma'am, there is worse news; Mrs. Ward sent; she thought you might wish to come. All is not over yet, but she seems sinking."

Mrs. Berkeley uttered an exclamation of true distress; her better nature was called forth.

"My own dear Agnes, can it be? Oh! Arden, let me go at once; order the carriage, anything you can get quickest."

Mrs. Berkeley reached the house. She walked feebly up-stairs; the room door was open for air; the doctor sat near the bed, and there too sat Lucy Crofton. Even at that moment, Mrs. Berkeley's keen, world-tutored eye noticed her air of refinement and grace; but still more the grave dignity

of earnest grief which was impressed upon her face, and the repose of the small delicate features, as if the character was schooled to self-control. Lucy was too far absorbed in anxious care for her friend to waste a thought on herself, and her eyes turned for a moment with no wavering gaze to the tall stately woman who had just entered. It was George Berkeley's mother *she knew*, but she only *felt* that the friend who was lying by her had perhaps but minutes more of life and preparation for eternity.

Mrs. Berkeley silently took the chair the doctor placed for her. He said "She *may* awake." Lucy seemed to hear the words gently as they were spoken, for a faint colour tinged her cheek. The faithful Ward stood near, true to her task ; she shed no tears, but there was the care-worn, anxious look, that seemed to say that all she loved best in the world lay there dying, and her only use was to wait to the last to help her !

So another half hour passed ; Lucy looked at Dr. Newton ; the hand that lay in hers moved ; was it the coming of the last struggle ? The doctor drew nearer, he felt the pulse, he turned a satisfied look on Ward and on Lucy, or perhaps their hopes deceived them. No ; the closed eyes were opened for a moment only ; then again, another anxious interval,

and the doctor's face again looked grave. Agnes Spencer, what if this is your last moment of life ! In these days of illness, what thoughts have been your companions ! There may be a few years left to you, make use of them, for the day *will* come, if it is not present now !

The clock in the passage struck the hour. It seemed to the watchers as if its startling tones would never cease ; it was ten o'clock, but before the last two beats, as if roused by the sound, again the heavy eyes unclosed, and the lips moved. "Lucy," was the only word that reached the ear, but they knew that Agnes Spencer was still alive.

The anxious watch was over, and the doctor signified that there must be perfect quiet. Lucy stole to her own room; when there alone she could pour out her heart as the Christian only can ; all her thankfulness, all her sorrow, all her anxiety, blended and interwoven—without words, almost without definite thought—she could feel alone that all would be understood. Agnes lived, but Lucy was well aware that the danger was not past.

Close beneath the room where those anxious hours were passed, the beautiful ocean went on rolling wave after wave, telling of infinite power and unfailing perpetuity—striking in its immensity and force as compared to that poor feeble body,

lying in that small room, hovering between life and death. Lucy looked out of her window at this restless mass of waters, and the moonlight fell in a stream of silver light on a long vista of numberless waves, gradually lessening and lessening till they were lost in the vast expanse of distance. Grand and infinite as that ocean seemed, yet Lucy knew that there was no infinity and grandeur there to be compared to that of the spirit imprisoned within the frail suffering body, which to mortal eyes might so soon be nothing but mouldering dust, but which had its destiny high above all other created things.

The days passed on with no apparent change.

"I cannot say that there is any progress," said Dr. Newton in answer to Lucy's anxious inquiry. "But we need not despair; everything must be done to set her mind at rest. The mind is the great difficulty; if we could give it a dose of laudanum without touching the body, she would recover."

During the continuance of the illness, Mrs. Berkeley and Lucy constantly met; and often, whilst Lucy was occupied with Agnes, Mrs. Berkeley's eyes followed her with shrewd, piercing scrutiny.

Sometimes Lucy was conscious that those clear gray eyes were intently watching her. Then for a

moment, a bright colour suffused her face, as if a feeling of just indignation sent the blood to her cheeks, and her head was raised with quiet self-respect, and there was in her delicate feminine countenance, an expression of calm displeasure, bordering on contempt, which told that kind and gentle as was her nature, there was a sense of proper dignity, that would forbid any attempt at insulting condescension or arrogant assumption of superiority from Mrs. Berkeley. She showed the natural respect of a younger person to an elder one, and the conventional respect due to Mrs. Berkeley's position, but that was all. Those soft eyes of Lucy's could also look deep into the heart, and as poor Agnes had once said to her "Oh ! do not look at me, your eyes reprove me ;" so Mrs. Berkeley could at times have exclaimed as she met Lucy's calm searching look, "Oh ! do not look at me, I cannot bear the self-reproach, those eyes convey to my conscience!"

And Mrs. Berkeley watched Lucy in the room of her friend, and she saw that she was useful, ready to help, quick in perception, cheerful, tender, and quiet ; there was not a movement, an action, or a word, but told of thorough refinement of mind and character. This, then, was the Lucy Crofton

she had bidden her son never to marry, and he had obeyed her, and Lucy was perhaps forgotten.

Lucy had given Agnes a full account of her conversations with Arthur Colville. Agnes had seemed nervously anxious to hear about him, and as soon as her lips could utter the request, she said to Lucy "Tell me all." It was some days since this occurred : Agnes was weaker, and Dr. Newton was evidently less sanguine about her. Once or twice when Lucy was close to her she heard her half murmuring to herself the name of her lover, and when the slight delirium of weakness came on, she seemed trying to ask something respecting him.

Lucy had been reading the Bible to her. She stopped. Agnes looked anxiously at her.

"I am weaker," she said at last. "I know what is likely to be—but, Lucy, before it happens I must see him." She laid her hand on Lucy's. "Write to him Lucy, promise me. Tell him the truth. Tell him I may die—there is no time to spare—he will not refuse now. It is more for his sake than for my own." She paused between each sentence for strength. She added, "If I died, and he had not forgiven me, he could never be happy again."

CHAPTER XVII.

I MUST now take the reader back to Hulse Parsonage. About a week after Lucy had been summoned to Linedon, Mr. Colville came to the Croftons. Mrs. Walter received him with pleasure. She had something to tell him, and there is a certain satisfaction in finding a listener even for bad news.

" You will not see Lucy, to-day, Mr. Colville," she said ; " indeed, I don't know when you will see her again."

Mr. Colville looked as much annoyed as Mrs. Crofton wished. " I am very sorry," he said, " but if pleasure alone has taken Miss Crofton away....." he was beginning to speak querulously ; but Mrs. Crofton chimed in,

" Oh ! not at all ! anything but pleasure ! No, indeed ; poor Lucy went away very unhappy, full of regrets in all ways " (this was intended as a slight

consolation for her hearer), “and I grieve to say she is not happier yet.”

“Illness?” said Mr. Colville, rather impatiently.

“Yes, very dangerous illness. Her greatest friend, Miss Spencer, is dangerously ill.”

Did Mrs. Crofton observe the start—the change of countenance in her visitor? No! luckily for him her attention was averted. Walter Crofton had forgotten a book which he wanted for one of his parishioners; he returned home to look for it; there was a little delay and confusion owing to his hasty entry and search for the missing book, and Mr. Colville had time to recover himself, and having learnt all he could about Miss Spencer’s illness he rode home.

Mrs. Crofton was certain that he cared for Lucy. His great appearance of concern on hearing of the illness of an utter stranger was a convincing proof of it.

“It is well that Mr. Colville should suffer,” said my sister Martha.

“Poor fellow!” said Jane sadly, “he is much to be pitied; but pray, brother, let us know what is happening at Linedon.”

“Certainly,” said I.

George Berkeley it seems had just arrived there, and a remark from Ward, that Mrs. Berkeley would be happy now her son was with her, made Lucy aware that he was come.

Poor Lucy ! she rushed to her room that she might give way to a passionate burst of tears. Was George Berkeley so careless that he could bear an accidental meeting ? The door bell rang—she sank down—her heart throbbing as if it would break. There was a knock at her door. It was her maid saying that Mrs. Berkeley had called to ask after Miss Spencer ; Lucy hesitated a moment. Should she merely send a message ? But no—if not to-day, on some other day she must see Mrs. Berkeley, and calming herself as best she might, she walked down stairs.

Mrs. Berkeley saw at once that Lucy had been crying. She looked anxiously, even affectionately at her. “ Is she worse ? ” was her question.

“ No—not worse,” said Lucy. She did not know what deep dejection there was in her look and tone, as she uttered those words. She felt that Agnes was dying by slow degrees, and that her own life was blighted by a less evident sorrow, and her voice betrayed some of her sadness. What it was that moved her cannot be told, but Mrs.

Berkeley's eyes filled with tears, and she laid her hand tenderly on Lucy's.

"My dear Miss Crofton," she said, "this is too much for you."

Lucy looked up, as if startled out of composure.

This Mrs. Berkeley, this woman who had destroyed her happiness, was now looking at her and speaking to her with affectionate anxiety! She could restrain herself no longer—covering her face with her hands, she burst into tears; but ashamed and angry at her own weakness in exposing her agitation to the stern enemy who had worked her woe, she said "I have been very anxious, pray excuse my want of control! I will not stay to annoy you with a scene," and she hastily left the room. If Mrs. Berkeley wished to express her sympathy, Lucy had thus prevented her from doing so.

She remained alone to think over what had just passed. Did she go back in fancy to the day in which a letter had been received, and an answer written? A day when Miss Crofton might have been gay and happy, and that letter had brought a crushing sorrow down upon her? Did she recall the words which had been written in the first anguish it had occasioned—"I need every prayer, and every blessing that your heart and your lips can

frame!" and added, "as you deal truly and honestly by us, may God's blessing rest upon you!" Did all this pass over the mind of Mrs. Berkeley as Lucy's dignified calmness, the touching sadness of her voice, and her look of suffering presented themselves before her?

Had she dealt truly and honestly by her, and by her son, her own dear George? What was the cause of his depression? He vainly thought it concealed from her, but she saw too well his distracted, pained look. She had not dared to tell him of Lucy's presence at Linedon: had he discovered it? Was this the cause of his deepening sadness? Perhaps it was only the effect of his anxiety for Agnes? Mrs. Berkeley knew his affectionate nature, and his love for her, but in her heart she did not believe that this was the cause. She asked to see Ward, if she was not just then engaged with her mistress.

Ward came for a few minutes. She said she saw no progress in Miss Spencer.

"I hope you will not be knocked up," said Mrs. Berkeley.

"I hope not, ma'am. I take all the care I can of myself for the sake of being helpful to her, poor dear lady!"

"And Miss Crofton, Ward?"

"Ah! ma'am," said Ward, "Miss Crofton always tries to be cheerful, that she may be of use. But I see her looking sadly—sadly. My poor dear mistress loves her next to her own father, and as you have named her, ma'am, I hope you will excuse my taking the liberty to ask if you could kindly look after her a little, for my dear lady's sake. Excuse me, ma'am, for naming it."

"Oh! Ward," said Mrs. Berkeley, with a curious catching at her breath, "you and I are old friends. From what you say, Miss Crofton has a strong claim upon me. She shall be cared for, Ward. She shall be happy, if I can make her so."

And as Mrs. Berkeley walked out of the house after this interview, there was a calmer expression on that grand face of hers. "Yes, she *shall* be made happy, if it is not too late!" was the thought passing through her mind as she regained her own home.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"How is Agnes?" was George Berkeley's anxious question, as his mother came in.

"No better."

George Berkeley paced the room with perturbed steps.

"Sit down, my dear boy," said Mrs. Berkeley, "I want to speak to you; I have been much agitated to-day."

"My dear mother, what is it?" said George Berkeley, at once sitting down by his mother, throwing his arm fondly round her, and looking anxiously at her.

Mrs. Berkeley smiled, and kissed the dear hand that was thrown so lovingly round her: then said, "It is for your sake, my George! yes, I have been deeply touched. George I have done you harm, I have wronged you, but I hope to retrieve my error. Well, George, I will not dally with the truth;

Miss Crofton is here, I have seen her, I have been seeing her for a whole week."

George started, he dropped his mother's hand, he turned pale. "Mother, mother," he said at last, "Why did not you tell me this? why did you bring me here? what have you done?" he started up; he was in violent agitation.

"My George, my own George, forgive me! Be calm a moment. But have I guessed rightly?" She looked piercingly at her son's face, writhing as it was under the attempt to suppress his strong emotion. "Nay, my George, forgive me, I wanted to tell you I was wrong—I retract—I withdraw my refusal."

George Berkeley did not speak.

"George, my dear boy, speak to me! Tell me what it is that moves you thus?"

George Berkeley stood still; he spoke; they were words of bitter meaning. "Mother," he said, "the evil is done; it is too late, I cannot see Miss Crofton. I must leave you to-morrow. I cannot meet her. Oh! mother! mother! What have you done!" and he left the room.

Was it then too late? Had George Berkeley, her son, formed some new tie? Had he pledged himself to some one, and in secret from her—from his mother! Who, what was she, this new dreaded

evil? Oh! what would she now have given to make sure of his attachment to that very person from whom she had so violently torn him, but a few years before.

Her thoughts wandered back years and years; she ransacked her memory to think of any whom George had seemed to prefer. Suddenly, a disagreeable idea sprung up. There was a lovely, most attractive Lady Emily Newnham, of whom George had seen much when she first came out in London society. She was the admired of all beholders; but, if the world spoke truly, after a while this beautiful girl, who was so scornful to others, half broke her heart for the love of the handsome, agreeable George Berkeley, who did not return her affection. He had, perhaps, flirted with her, as many others did; but that was all. She had run through her time of misery, saw herself neglected by him, and consoled herself by marrying a rich fool that same year. Since then the beautiful Lady Brendon had taken to herself other comforters; her attractions were greater than ever; and many were the cases whispered, or loudly talked of, of such a youth being *done for*, poor fellow! madly in love with Lady Brendon!

Mrs. Berkeley remembered that, whenever George appeared, the colour rushed to her face, or she

would turn pale with agitation and vexation if she saw him attentive to others. Surrounded as she might be with admirers, there was carelessness for all but him whenever he was present. George had frequently seen her in the country during her own illness this last year. Had she succeeded at last? In despair at being thwarted in a virtuous attachment, had he fallen a victim to the wiles of of an abandoned, artful married woman? Oh! Mrs. Berkeley, what a pang shot through your heart as this idea gained strength in your mind! If your son had fallen, whose doing was it? Was it not yours? you, who had checked a virtuous passion from purely selfish motives? Was not this the fitting reward for your cares and toils?

When Mrs. Berkeley again saw her son he looked pale and worn, but he was calm, and especially tender and considerate in his manner towards her. They passed the evening together. As he wished her good-night, he said,

“I am sorry to have distressed you this morning. I was not myself. All I have to beg is, that you will kindly let the subject drop. I know you will not mention it again, when I ask you as a great favour not to do so. I will stay another day. I can avoid meeting.” And he fondly kissed his mother as the tears streamed down her cheeks, and

added, “At this anxious time I like to be with my dear mother.”

Oh! with what tenderness, with what a charm were those last words spoken, “*my dear mother.*” Mrs. Berkeley was indeed happy to have won for herself the strong affection and respect of such a son!

“Good-night, my dear, my darling boy,” she said, “my blessing and joy. I will do and say what you wish; only, George, never desert your old mother!” The affectionate kiss assured her she need not fear, and she retired to rest with a heart somewhat lightened of its load.

It was early the next day that George Berkeley called at Miss Spencer’s house to inquire how she was. The servant asked him to wait in the entrance-hall till Miss Spencer’s maid could answer his inquiry. As he stood there a letter lay on the table ready for the post. His eyes, half unthinkingly, turned to it. The address attracted him—Arthur Colville, Esq., Hulse House. The writing was well known to him. Once, long ago, as it now seemed to him, a note had been put into his hands—the words had been few and sorrowful; they had been penned by the very same hand in which that address was written. Those treasured lines had now (for how long was it?) been laid aside. They

had ceased to be treasured ! but this address recalled them.

George Berkeley received the message that Miss Spencer had passed a better night. He went home ; he told his mother he must leave her that evening.

“ Write to me daily, if you can,” he said ; “ I cannot recover the idea of Agnes Spencer’s danger. She is a friend we cannot afford to lose.”

After George Berkeley left that day, a letter arrived for him, with an earl’s coronet and the cypher E. B., and the post-mark of the Brendon’s Place. Again Mrs. Berkeley’s heart sank within her. The hateful letter must be forwarded--let it contain what poison it might. In the letter that accompanied it, Mrs. Berkeley said, “ I see the fair Emily is your correspondent. I hear young Ravenscroft, of the Guards, was the last adorer, and that encouragement to throw himself at her feet was by no means wanting.”

Lucy Crofton heard that morning that George Berkeley had left Linedon.

The dread, the fear, and the hope of meeting, were thus equally at an end ! He had made no attempt to see her ; he had quietly acquiesced in the decision which to her had been a duty ; he had perhaps ceased to regret that his mother’s will had been

opposed to his own ! She was left to her fate ; left to struggle on as best she might, watching by the bedside of her friend, with no hope to cheer her, no anxious affection to watch over her safety ! that one friend, too, would soon be taken from her. These were her desponding thoughts. Her mind was unhinged ; the strain upon it had been too great.

But this desponding mood did not last—her prayers for resignation were answered. She again took her place by the side of Agnes, with ready, untiring affection, able and willing to love and to help till all earthly help was unneeded.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE dark days were come again. October was almost gone, and November's cold mists and gloom were hanging over the land. They rested heavily on Hulse House. Lucy was away and Agnes was in danger. But there was light breaking in through the gloom, such as had not fully entered in the last dreary November.

Lucy's words in the many conversations they had had since his accident—the accident itself—gratitude for his recovery and many slight incidents—apparent trifles—all consciously or unconsciously had had a favourable effect upon Arthur Colville. As he reached his home on the day when the news of Agnes Spencer's illness had startled him into agitation, his long-harboured resentment, the monomania as it might be considered, of so many years, prevented the truth from coming fully home to his mind. He was

shocked and distressed, but he could not see that he ought to forgive ; he still felt that it was *just* resentment on his part. But there was a counter-current of unquenched love — of eager desire that Agnes should live. Why, his reason did not tell him ; but there was in reality always in the far distance a hope that Agnes would be restored to him. It seemed a contradiction, for he said to himself, that he would never forgive her or see her again ; and yet how often in imagination did he again see her ! how often pour forth to her with vehement indignation the history of all she had made him suffer ! how often in fancy had she wept at his bitter words—had answered his accusations, and tried in vain to frame excuses for her conduct. But still forgiveness was never to be the end.

During the week following Mrs. Crofton's announcement there were constant wrestlings in his mind ; at times he prayed, surprised, as it were, into prayer ; that Agnes, *his* Agnes, might live, and that he might be restored to her. Then came a revulsion of feeling, and he would not allow that he had any selfish interest in the poor faulty being who had wronged him. Yet, hour after hour, Agnes dying was the image before his eyes. He dared not go again to Hulse Parsonage, dreading

the announcement that might meet him there ; he felt he could not stand that announcement in the presence of others. He sent daily to inquire, and Mrs. Crofton read alone in his inquiries his anxious love for Lucy.

About ten days after he heard the first news of Agnes Spencer's illness, a letter was brought to him. The very few letters that he could possibly receive had lately been admitted, for Hodson had skilfully contrived to make his master forget his former rule. Mr. Colville saw that the letter was from Lucy Crofton ; he laid it down—he trembled violently—he dared not open it. He knew what it must be. Why should she write, but to tell him that all was over ! He would then have given worlds for one hour of Agnes Spencer's life—one hour in which to pour forth to her the assurance of his unchanging love—his full forgiveness.

But a sudden hope revived him ; he seized the letter—he tore it open—he read. Then he flung himself on his knees, pressed his hands to his forehead, and murmured words of earnest prayer.

“ Agnes, my Agnes !” was his exclamation over and over again. “ Agnes, my Agnes !” and then he was calm ; and then again the letter was seized, and read once more, as if the words would be im-

bibed into his very heart. Then, again, he paced the room as if struggling for outward composure, and so on in alternate bursts of quiet and of agitation. At length he rang the bell. Hodson came.

"Hodson," he said, "I have had news that has greatly moved me; I have no secrets from you, and now is no time for them. The moment you can get a conveyance, I am going into Devonshire. Miss Spencer is dangerously ill. I must see her. Hodson you know all; arrange for me; not an instant's delay that can be helped."

Hodson left the room.

"Now, thank God, for any sorrow that can save him!" was the ejaculation that escaped his lips, but tears were in his eyes.

Barker Preston came to the Parsonage on the following morning.

"So we have lost our recluse," he said after listening to a few remarks from Mrs. Crofton to which he did not seem to attend.

"Lost Mr. Colville!" exclaimed Mrs. Walter.

"Yes!" said Mr. Preston sulkily, as if his going was an injury to himself. "Yes; he is gone! I thought he might move at last."

"Gone!" exclaimed Mrs. Crofton again. "Do you mean that Mr. Colville has left the neighbourhood, or has just gone out riding as usual?" she

continued in a sharp, angry tone, for Mr. Colville's departure was not pleasing to her.

"Oh!" said Mr. Preston, still in a vexed, sulky tone; "he will come back again fast enough. He is not gone for good."

Mrs. Crofton became easier, but not more good-humoured with Mr. Preston for alarming her.

"Mr. Preston," she said tartly, "I cannot think why you take such pleasure in making up odd, romancing stories and bringing them to me, just to fidget me, and try my nerves. As if I had not enough to do so without having inventions to annoy me."

"Ah, well, well!" said Barker Preston shaking himself a little; "I spoke mysteriously, Mrs. Crofton, and I beg your pardon. But it is quite true. Mr. Colville set off early this morning for Devonshire."

Mrs. Crofton looked an instant at Mr. Preston in amazement as if she could not at first take in the truth of his words; and then to Barker Preston's surprise she clapped her hands together with a joyful exclamation, "Gone to Linedon?"

Barker Preston nodded assent.

"My dear Mr. Preston, this is indeed delightful! Poor dear Mr. Colville! You know Mr. Preston it is for him I feel so glad; you know our

anxiety about him—Mr. Crofton's anxiety that he should be restored to society, and—and.....”

Mrs. Crofton felt it prudent to stop, and, indeed, she was in such excitement of satisfaction, that she could scarcely express all she meant—so she retreated again to the safe exclamation, “Gone to Linedon!” as the summing up of all her pleasure. But she suddenly remembered there might be a mistake. How could Mr. Preston know that he was gone?

Barker Preston said, very sorrowfully, “It is quite certain, Mrs. Crofton. I fell in with the carriage, and then I fell in with the portmanteau, and then with the servant ; but it is no use telling all the particulars, so good morning. Any news to-day of Miss Spencer?”

Mrs. Crofton looked grave. “Yes, bad!—I fear there is no hope ; but then poor Lucy, you see—poor Lucy will have a friend there.”

Barker Preston left the room without waiting to say good-bye a second time. Poor fellow ! tears were in his eyes as he rode home that morning, although he had blustered it out with an attempt at ill humour, which could never last long in his good, warm heart.

Thirty years ago, the date of my story, railways were but in their infancy ; journeys were not per-

formed as they now are; communication by electric telegraph was unknown; and thus Arthur Colville went on his long, weary journey, with ample time for thought.

There was strangeness almost bewildering in itself in the return to outer life; had his mind been less fully engrossed by one absorbing anxiety, he would have suffered with nervous sensitiveness from the fear of remark. But, except for the first half hour, he forgot all—all but that Agnes Spencer's life hung on a thread, and that he might be too late to ask her forgiveness. The words of Lucy Crofton's letter were stamped on his brain—they were the words she had quoted from the lips of Agnes: "If I died, and he had not forgiven me, he could never be happy again!" Agnes was right. Colville felt that all chance of peace to him was at an end, if he did not see her once more.

Blind, hard-hearted, wicked, that he had been! Why had he not taken Lucy's reproof when it had been given! It was now perhaps too late. Perhaps before he arrived at Linedon Agnes would be beyond the reach of any words of forgiveness from him! The revival of his strong love, the agonizing remorse that had seized hold of him, might never be known to her!

Why did the conveyance creep, as to his fevered

fancy it seemed to do—one minute sooner, and he might see Agnes—that minute's delay might make the difference of a life of unavailing regret, or the sweet consciousness that she had been restored to him before she died. On!—on! Oh, how did each delay press upon him! the careless way in which the postilion dawdled before he mounted his horse—the dilatory civilities of the landlord—some errand from the pretty barmaid, calling back the postilion when he was at last going to mount, and then, when well off, the sleepy or drunken waggoner, whose waggon blocked up the way—then the mistake of the driver, who misinterpreted the direction, and had just turned off the right road!

Whilst Arthur Colville is journeying along, we will return to Linedon. Mr. Spencer was still unable to move from London. Agnes gradually became weaker, but at times she was able to talk with Lucy, and these conversations were very precious to her. Illness and sorrow had done their work of mercy on the heart of Agnes. There were whispered words, the meaning of which was clear and bright, even though the words themselves were but half pronounced. But at times the world and worldly affections regained their power. Her

anxiety as to the result of Lucy's communication to Mr. Colville was often painfully intense.

"Oh, Lucy!" she said, "how can I die without seeing him. Pray for rest to my soul! I cannot free myself from this earthly tie! Yet, Lucy, I feel and know that if I were happy I might recover. I think I shall—if he comes!"

CHAPTER XX.

IT was a bright morning—almost like October in its gay sunshine and fresh air. The sea rolled lazily, wave after wave, as if enjoying the beauty of the sky that smiled down upon it. Lucy looked out at the vivid colouring of sea, rock, and landscape; sad and anxious as she was, the charm of such a day revived and cheered her, and almost a smile rested on her lips as she stood at the open window, and let the morning air blow upon her face.

She started as the front door bell rang. Could her letter have received its best answer? No! she would not let herself hope; it was certainly only some chance visitor, or Mrs. Berkeley come earlier than usual. There was a slight bustle in the hall; then the drawing-room door was opened. Lucy's hand was seized and pressed. Arthur Colville was

indeed there ! he could only say, “ Thank God she is alive !”—he staggered to a chair.

It was some minutes before he could speak. But when the first agitating moments were over, Lucy had to listen to his eager inquiries, his confessions, his self-reproaches.

Then ensued an anxious consultation as to the best way of preparing Agnes for seeing him. The doctor was in the house—sufficient information was given to enable him to advise as to the expediency of allowing a meeting to take place. It was decided that Lucy should name his arrival, and then the doctor said,

“ Let her feelings be your guide. It is a risk, but where the danger otherwise is so great, it is better to try what may be the only chance of cure.”

The stress on the word *only*, sufficiently showed his opinion of the case, and as Lucy undertook the task, she fully realised the fact that her words might cause immediate peril to the life of Agnes. She went into her room. It had been neatly arranged as usual by the active, handy Ward. Everything was prettily placed, and made to appear fresh and bright, as if illness had not been there. As Lucy drew near to the sofa on which Agnes lay, her eyes were fixed upon her.

"Lucy," she said at once, "he is come. I heard his voice."

Strange, mysterious power at times bestowed in illness! that quick perception almost like a new sense. Lucy was certain that in ordinary circumstance no one could have heard voices from whence Agnes must have heard them. Whatever it was, she repeated, "I heard his voice. Bring him to me, before it is too late."

Lucy said, "Are you strong enough?" The answer was a "Yes," that told much to Lucy's ready comprehension. She said quietly, "Mr. Colville is come. I will bring him to you;" and she left the room.

The dark, lustrous eyes of Agnes followed her, beaming with almost unnatural light. They seemed to watch Lucy as if they could look beyond the door that closed after her, and on into Colville's presence. They were fixed on the door as it again opened. Lucy's slight figure gave way to another —one oh! how ardently longed for! how often present with her in thought in her long feverish illness.

Arthur Colville stood for a moment, not daring to come forward—he faltered. Agnes's voice was heard; her feeble voice uttered a half cry, half exclamation, shrill and distinct. "Arthur! Arthur!"

and her hands were raised as if to draw him to her. As he heard her cry, he hesitated no longer; he rushed forwards, he was at her side; he and Agnes were once more together! her slight wasted arms were thrown round him with the firm grasp that strong excitement gave, as if she feared to lose him again, and as if with her weak arms she fancied that she could hold him for ever. Yes, they were together, once more united in heart. That she perhaps was dying, was forgotten by both in that first moment of joy; but when they could remember anything but that they were re-united, the wild torturing agony at the recollection of her danger came back.

“To lose you! Oh! Agnes, Agnes! how can I bear it?”

“Ah, Arthur!” she faintly whispered, “do not say that. Are not we happy together once more?”

The medical man would not allow a long interview, and Arthur Colville was soon summoned away. Agnes had had as much excitement as she could bear; what the effect would be was uncertain; she must rest; but to Colville there could be no rest. The doctor proposed that he should lie down, and try to get some sleep, as he had travelled all night; but Colville resisted.

“Let me be near her,” he said, “as long as I

can ; it may not be for long !” and then again he was completely overpowered by his agitation and anxiety.

Then there were questions to Lucy, and broken exclamations, “That I should have refused to see her ! refused to forgive her ! and she, loving me still, loving me always ! My only excuse is, that I was deceived about her—she was calumniated to me, and I believed what was utterly false. But this is not enough to excuse me—refuse to see *her* !” Then again he covered his face with his hands, and moaned forth his prayers for her life.

About two hours had passed, when Ward came out of Agnes’s room—she beckoned to Lucy. Colville sprang forwards ; he saw alarm in her face ; Agnes seemed sinking. Dr. Newton went into the room. Colville stood within call, his hands clasped in silent agony and prayer. Agnes revived, she unclosed her eyes ; they wandered round, as if eagerly looking for some one. Then she said in an agitated nervous whisper to Lucy who sat by her—

“Was it a dream ? Was Arthur Cleveland here ? Oh ! no, it could only be a dream !” and she sank back again.

Lucy said gently, “It was not a dream ; he is

here still." Agnes half raised her head—a flash of joy passed over her face.

"Thank God! thank God! His mercy is more than I deserve!" Then she sank again; her face was calm, and soon she slept.

Arthur Colville, or Arthur Cleveland as we must now call him, crept in. The doctor thought the sight of him at once, if Agnes awoke, might have a good and composing effect. There was in Dr. Newton's wording of that sentence an emphasis that made Lucy shudder; but Cleveland, too much absorbed with contemplation of his long lost Agnes, had not observed it. *If* Miss Spencer awakes, were Dr. Newton's words, and Lucy saw their meaning in an instant. Once before she had watched with the same doubt in her thoughts.

It is often difficult or impossible to fathom the mysteries of our life, and the seeming inconsistencies of our trials; but here to the eye of sense Divine mercy and goodness were evident. Agnes Spencer's impetuous character was subdued by illness, and by hope deferred; and Arthur Cleveland, who seemed only hardened by the misery of self-imposed solitude, was touched at length through the medium of his affections. A love begun in the heyday of youth and prosperity, continued through suffering and alienation, till the life of its object

was in danger, brought him in his despair to rest on the only help which never fails.

To both of them the lessons of affliction seemed to bring a blessing, for as Agnes lay on her sick bed, a peace which she had never known before visited her soul ; and as Arthur Cleveland watched by her, he, too, learnt to rest with confidence in the faith which had seemed to him but a beautiful deceiving illusion, when Lucy Crofton had first spoken of it after her own sorrow.

The hours rolled on, and Cleveland sat gazing at Agnes as she lay almost motionless, in a sleep that might be but the forerunner of death. It was a fearful thing to watch ; Arthur Cleveland turned away at times, and covered his face with his hands, unable to suppress the moans of anguish that burst from him as his remorse for the past and his fears for the future seemed almost to overwhelm him.

At length Agnes moved ; her eyes opened ; she first saw Lucy.

“ Arthur ! is he here ?” was whispered. He came forward. Agnes half smiled. “ Pray for me—pray for yourself, Arthur !” she said, in measured but scarcely audible tones. Then she sank again, and sleep or stupor once more overpowered her.

But as Arthur Cleveland stood watching her,

the light seemed to have flashed into his heart ; all his religious doubts had ceased, and, for the first time, he felt he could *rejoice* in sorrow ! "God has been very good to us," had been almost her last words ; and Cleveland felt to his inmost soul that God had indeed been very good to him. In the midst of his grief, this feeling was uppermost. He had found out the loving kindness of God.

CHAPTER XXI.

WHILE death seemed hovering over the house where Agnes Spencer lay, and yet delaying to strike, it had struck where it was neither feared nor expected. On the day before Arthur Cleveland's arrival at Linedon, Mrs. Berkeley received a letter announcing the illness of her eldest son, Frederick. There was nothing alarming in the account, but as Mrs. Berkeley was of an anxious mind, she prepared to set off to nurse him in London. She only waited another day on account of her solicitude about Agnes, and during this day she was told of a circumstance which puzzled and surprised her: a gentleman, who had arrived at Linedon and was staying at the hotel, had been admitted to see Agnes.

“ Oh ! ” said Mrs. Berkeley, when she heard of it, “ it is, of course, Miss Crofton’s brother.”

“ No, ma’am, it is not ; it is a Mr. Colville.”

"Mr. Colville!" said Mrs. Berkeley, and she pondered on the information. "Could Agnes be betrothed to this Mr. Colville?"

She wrote that day as usual to George, and mentioned the circumstance, asking him if he had ever heard of any admirer of Agnes's of this name.

But all thought of him, or even of Agnes herself, was shortly erased from Mrs. Berkeley's mind.

Another letter, three days after the first, told her that her son Frederick was no more! She left Linedon to go back to her melancholy home in London, and to turn with redoubled tenderness to the one son who alone remained to her.

When Lucy was told what had happened, it took some time to restore her spirits even to outward composure. The knowledge that George Berkeley was in grief, and that she was unable to offer him even the commonest words of sympathy, caused her very painful agitation and distress. Must this estrangement last for ever? She was bound by her promise to Mrs. Berkeley to submit passively to their separation, but there was a mystery in George Berkeley's quiet acquiescence which she could not solve.

But after the first shock on hearing of Frederick Berkeley's sudden death, Lucy could scarcely spare a thought from Agnes. The sleep or stupor into

which she had again sunk continued till hope was almost extinct; but at last the crisis was past, and Agnes Spencer was pronounced out of danger.

I will not dwell on the time that immediately followed. Agnes was slowly regaining her strength; but her nerves were much shaken, and her own wish to move for a few months to some quiet place, where she could have complete rest from excitement, was strongly seconded by the medical man. Arthur Cleveland with difficulty acquiesced. He was alarmed and suspicious; he trembled lest the blessing so strangely restored to him should again slip from his grasp, and he could scarcely be reasonable in his objections.

"What, Agnes! must I lose you again?" he said. "Must I lose you again? I deserve it I know; but do not ask it. I cannot part with you!"

But Agnes spoke gravely and firmly; she tried to reason away his distress and his fears.

"We must be cheerful and hopeful," she said; "but we must part for awhile, Arthur. We must learn to know more of our own feelings. I am still very wild and flighty; let me have time for change and for thought. We could not be happy yet."

And Cleveland's judgment at last acquiesced in the reasonableness of her wish, although his heart

rebelled against it. They separated for a few months. Arthur Cleveland did not return to Hulse House, but went abroad immediately from Linedon.

For the present, no one, excepting Walter Crofton, was to be admitted into their confidence. Even Mrs. Walter was to be kept in ignorance. If Arthur himself was indifferent on the subject, Agnes could not bear the idea that his strange seclusion should be made the subject of common gossip.

Arthur Cleveland's intention was to return to his own home in the north, after his marriage with Agnes, and by a proper attention to the duties belonging to his station he hoped in time to regain some degree of his lost self-esteem ; these were his hopes and plans for the future, but for the present his mind was too much shaken for any exertion, and he could scarcely do more than mourn over his own sin. His feelings had been so cruelly shattered, that he could not quickly rally ; there were alternations of gloom and of hopefulness, and time was wanted before he could expect to feel either calmness or even any settled religious peace and happiness.

CHAPTER XXII.

“MR. COLVILLE gone!—gone abroad!” was Mrs. Walter’s exclamation, when Lucy returned to the Parsonage. She said no more; she understood it—Lucy had refused him. But why? Lucy said, with some agitation, “that she thought it a wise measure, and she was glad of it for his sake.”

“But we shall miss him,” said Mrs. Walter, craftily.

“Oh, *very* much!” said Lucy, as if speaking with her whole heart. Mrs. Walter was puzzled. Lucy then had not refused him; he must be coming back.

“We shall be very glad to see him again, I am sure,” she said.

“Very, very glad,” said Lucy, still more heartily. Mrs. Walter was satisfied; he and Lucy would be married when he returned.

"My dear Lucy," she said, affectionately, "take care of yourself. You are not looking well."

Lucy smiled faintly. "It has been a trying time, as you know."

"Yes, indeed, particularly so!" was Mrs. Walter's remark. "But it was so kind of Mr. Colville to go to you! I always said he would turn out well. I knew he had a good heart!"

Lucy was too much occupied with her own thoughts to smile at Mrs. Walter's comfortable self-deception, though a dim recollection of epithets formerly applied to the recluse floated across her brain, as she left the room.

I am come to a break in my history. Like the dull, uninteresting day after a storm, all excitement and interest seemed to have ceased for a time.

The gray chimneys of Hulse House peered out of their surrounding trees, but there was no longer any curling smoke issuing from them—that tell-tale token that hitherto betrayed to the noisy world outside that a small fraction of human life was immured within the walls. Digby Manor was shut up. Agnes Spencer was abroad. Mrs. Berkeley in deep seclusion with her one remaining son. Edward Crofton's marriage postponed. Even

Mrs. Walter Crofton could not find any subject for gossip or excitement after the first weeks of active wonder at Mr. Colville's flight and Miss Spencer's recovery were over; and Lucy had time for rest. Her mind was at peace, except on one subject. She saw clearly that George Berkeley's love for her was extinct; that little bright dream of youth had been—and was over. It is hard to believe this, and to be contented under the belief, but there are other interests in the world besides our own happiness.

"I never was happy till I knew I could not be happy in this world," was a wise saying—paradoxical as it may seem—and we may be contented to leave Lucy Crofton with a conviction of its wisdom, as the months passed by; till at length she was summoned with her brother and Mrs. Walter to attend Edward Crofton's wedding.

There was a good deal of agitation to Lucy in a visit to Raymond Hall. The turrets of Berkeley Manor, where George Berkeley's boyhood had been spent, and the very windows that he had described to her, were actually to be seen from it. But now that she was close to his home, it seemed a matter of indifference to him whether she saw it or not!

This thought made her turn her face resolutely

away from the window that gave a full view of those fascinating gray turrets, and she bent it as resolutely to the contemplation of a pleasant prospect within the old baronial hall.

The sun, that had left the neighbouring house, shone steadily upon the family group at the Raymonds. Edward was very happy, and Lucy already loved Margaret ; but the Berkeleys were the frequent subject of conversation, and there were constant regrets expressed for their absence.

Mrs. Berkeley had never summoned courage to return to Berkeley Manor, after her eldest son's death, and George Berkeley was still with his mother. How often was he spoken of ! how often did Lucy hear his praises from the Raymonds ! She listened, with a mixture of pain and of pleasure, to their frequent comments on his affectionate heart, and on his touching devotion to his mother, and his brotherly care of poor Clara Wilton, whose engagement to Frederick Berkeley had been but just announced before his untimely death. She could say nothing herself ; she could not, in words, fill up the blanks in describing his perfections, that she felt were left even by the warm, friendly colouring of the Raymonds—but in her own heart they were not the less filled up ! The silent listeners are frequently the most interested. Mar-

garet noticed the subdued expression that often rested on Lucy's face, and she guessed that there was a history attached to it, but neither she nor Edward divined the truth.

And now the wedding-day arrived—the sun shone and the bells rang with all fitting merriment—Margaret Raymond became the wife of Edward Crofton. The exciting, busy, hurried morning was over, and the long, dreary, eventless afternoon succeeded to it. That also was past, and the Walter Croftons and Lucy returned home.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"WEDDINGS are very fatiguing. You look tired, Rosebud!" said Miss Walcott to Lucy, as she sat with her the day after she came home.

"Yes," said Lucy, "I am not sorry to rest at home after the excitement of being happy."

"Yes, that is just it!" exclaimed the little lady. "People are in such a state of exaltation at a wedding gathering! All the new family swear eternal friendship with every one of the other, and it is all sugar plums and nectar! Everybody is an angel, and there is nothing so tiring as this exuberant benevolence and goodness."

"Not if we were all really good," said Lucy.

"Really good!" said Miss Walcott, briskly. "You might as well say if people really had wings."

"Yes," said Lucy, sighing, Mrs. Berkeley somehow coming into her mind; "but how happy

the world would be if we could all be quite good!"

"Not at all!" chimed in Miss Walcott: "dull as ditch water! Why, child, there is scarcely a virtue or a pleasure that we have, that does not arise from resisting evil! If Sally never tried my temper, by saying, 'She wished I would wear a cap like a Christian,' what pleasure should I have in keeping my temper? It is Sally's crossness, and my own, that makes me happy! There is evil to resist, and I resist it like a second Jack the Giant Killer! Goodness was not dulness in Paradise; but now our business is to fight against sin! A sharp fight, too, and plenty of work to keep us awake. Your wedding angels will soon find this out! The cloven foot will show before the sugar plums are melted! And how did Edward behave? He took a book or two with him for the honeymoon, I guess!"

When Lucy went home that day from Miss Walcott's, she found a letter for her with a deep black border round the cover. She could never forget the pain that the same handwriting had once caused her; and she trembled as she saw the address, even though she laughed at her own folly in doing so, for she had received many notes from

Mrs. Berkeley at Linedon; and this one was probably nothing but an inquiry after Agnes Spencer.

It contained, however, more interest than she anticipated. It was this:

“MY DEAR MISS CROFTON—

“I was called away from Linedon by a great affliction, before I had fulfilled my intention of speaking to you, and since then I have had neither heart nor mind for anything but my grief. But what I could not say by word of mouth, I must now convey to you in writing. I wish to tell you that I entirely free you from the promise which you so nobly gave to me and which I frankly confess I was wrong in having exacted. Since I demanded it, I have made your acquaintance, and the only reparation I can now offer is to ask your pardon, and to confess that there is nothing I more fervently desire than to see you the wife of my only son. I will not wound your delicacy by asking for any written reply, but let me hope that time will bring the best answer to my earnest wishes, and pray believe, dear Miss Crofton, that I am,

“Always yours, with much esteem,

“FRANCES BERKELEY.”

Mrs. Berkeley then released her from her promise ! Cruel liberty ! it was worthless to her, for George Berkeley was severed from her, not by his mother's will but by his own. Unless he supposed that her affections were given to another, the experience of her own heart made her certain that he would have braved any pain, if he had not ceased to care for her, for the sake of seeing her again.

And now she could neither tell him that she was free, nor could she desire his mother to tell him, for what would this be but to force herself on his acceptance — perhaps his *unwilling* acceptance ! the only plea for telling him of her release was that of loving him still, and her womanly pride revolted with horror at the idea of such a humiliating disclosure when the continuance of his own love was doubtful. No, no ! the letter had come too late ; it was there to weep over—to hate—to love ! but it was worthless. And thus feeling she went again to the Raymonds.

As she passed the gray chimneys of Hulse House on her road, some rebellious thoughts came as she looked at them ; the recluse, who had spoken to her so bitterly of hopeless gloom, was happy and prosperous in his love, and she who had tried to teach him to be hopeful seemed at that instant thoroughly saddened and depressed.

It is in vain to deny that during that long journey, Lucy was often deep in unprofitable thoughts. She considered whether any chance might bring George Berkeley to the Raymonds, although she firmly believed that both he and his mother were far away. She thought, too, that she could well understand his unwillingness to see her if his feelings had changed ; even the mere awkwardness of meeting whilst his own professions of undying constancy must be still in his memory, would be enough to make him wish to avoid her ; but she nearly forgot all such foolish speculations as she was warmly welcomed by the Raymonds, and Edward and Margaret.

Edward's contented look, when his wife was near him, satisfied Lucy that he had not mistaken his own feelings, and the one short, earnest expression of interest about Agnes in Margaret's hearing told of no sensitive harbouring of his old attachment.

The house was full of relations to welcome the bride and bridegroom, and if Lucy could not get up any sisterly anxieties, she gleaned a good deal of amusement in watching Edward's vain attempts to recollect the civilities due from him to his wife's aunts and uncles, and first cousins, and cousins once removed, as they were all in turn introduced to his notice. He meant to be very civil, but he

could not understand why any one wanted more attention from him now than had been required a year ago.

But whilst he forgot the mere civilities of society, Edward Crofton never overlooked any real kindness; he never forgot to attend to his invalid sister-in-law, Ellen Raymond; and when a very small cousin broke the arm of her favourite doll as she tumbled just before Edward's feet, he took up the child and stopped the coming tears by a clever bit of carpentering on the doll's arm, and a dialogue between himself and the mended doll, which lasted till it was no more needed.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE next day at Raymond Hall dawned for Lucy with unexpected agitation. Lady Raymond said to Lord Raymond as she opened her letters at breakfast—

“Dear George Berkeley is at home ! I am much pleased. He promises to come to us this evening. He will join us at dinner.”

How strange it was that in all that party of intimate friends and affectionate relations, no one guessed what interest these words had for Lucy. Neither Edward nor Margaret had the slightest idea of her attachment to Mr. Berkeley, and thanks to this unconsciousness she managed to escape observation.

To her the whole matter was inexplicable. George Berkeley probably knew that she was there, and could he calmly bear to see her without any previous knowledge of her wishes or feelings ?

this too in the presence of others, and at a dinner-party, above all, when every word and look must be noticed ! She had neither nerve nor strength for such a meeting ! To sit at the dinner-table—perhaps opposite or next to him—with the full glare of light upon her face, through the whole length of an old-fashioned company dinner, seemed to her impossible !

But, on the other hand, to lose this—perhaps the only chance in her life of seeing him again—of ascertaining, as she felt she could in one instant, whether or not he still loved her, was equally, or rather far more than equally, dreadful. She therefore excused herself from dining down stairs, on the plea of a headache, but proposed joining the party in the drawing-room after dinner. During that long, tedious dinner she waited upstairs—it seemed interminable ; but when it was over could she summon courage to go down and wait again till he came in ?

Over and over again during those weary two hours his words—his looks—his overpowering agitation at their last meeting, were vividly before her. At length she was told that the ladies were in the drawing-room. She went down and joined them. Almost the first words she heard were these from Lady Mary Davies—

"How ill George Berkeley looks."

"He has never dined here since their sorrow," said Lady Raymond. "It was sadly trying to him, poor dear George, I am sure, for he scarcely spoke at all."

"No," said Lady Mary Davies, "and he is usually so agreeable."

While these and other remarks of the kind were going on, Lucy sat waiting and listening; one idea filling her whole mind, and making her head throb with almost intolerable pain. She and George Berkeley would once more be in the same room!

At length the door opened, and the sound of fresh voices told that the gentlemen had joined them. For some minutes after that sound she neither saw nor heard anything, and then her agitation came to a lull, and her eyes and ears were more than doubly conscious of all that was passing in that large light room.

George Berkeley was there—stern, cold, and pale. It was he, and yet it was not he! It could not be! not *her* George Berkeley! He had seen her—she knew, she felt, that he had. There had been a cold, half sarcastic look at her! She was sure of it, or had she dreamt it? for her pain was so great that she could scarcely recognise what was real from what was imaginary.

He had moved from the door to talk to Lady Raymond ; then he had drawn a chair near to Lady Mary Davies. He was established there : others of the party changed their places ; several came to talk to her ; to express regrets at missing her at dinner ; but George Berkeley never stirred. The hours wore on. Lucy dared not move ; she dared not go away to sob out her misery alone. There was no excuse for going away, and she must sit out these hours of torture whilst he was there—there in the same room with her—so near to her, and yet far, far away ; farther, in sympathy, than the veriest stranger who gave her the careless greeting of mere acquaintance. What was it ? Why was it ? ”

She turned to speak to Lord Raymond, and she thought she heard the door open.

“ Oh ! Berkeley ! George Berkeley ! ” cried out Lord Raymond, getting up as he spoke ; but George Berkeley was gone. Lord Raymond returned to his place by Lucy.

“ I wanted to ask Mr. Berkeley to come here to-morrow,” Lord Raymond said ; “ but he is just gone. Do you know him, Miss Crofton ? Poor fellow, he looks very ill. They have had a great family affliction. He is our pleasantest neighbour and our greatest friend, but you could not

judge of him this evening." He lowered his voice, " You will not mind my saying it, for we are *more* than contented now ! your brother is the son-in-law after my own heart—not to say anything of my little Margaret's—but to tell you the truth, before we knew him I had always wished that George Berkeley would take to her. But you are tired, my dear Miss Crofton ! Let an old man advise you—go off to bed at once. Now pray do. Here, Miladi," calling to Lady Raymond, " Miss Crofton must be sent off, her headache is so bad, and we shall see none of those pretty roses on her cheeks we had this morning if she does not get to bed directly."

Lucy could but just smile, and thank Lord Raymond for his kind care, and say that she would gladly obey his orders. She begged Lady Raymond not to come or send any one with her ; she only wanted rest ; and soon she was safe—safe in her own room. Here she could let her grief burst forth ! What was it ? Could it be true ? Had some one maligned her to him ? Had he learnt, not indifference only, but contempt ? Could his mother have acted the fiend's part, and written with honied words, whilst she was calumniating her in secret ?

The night passed with neither sleep nor rest,

and Lucy's headache was not better next morning when she was to return home. Tortured with vain guesses at the cause of George Berkeley's strange conduct, filled with anguish at the idea that he harboured some unjust suspicion against her, or, perhaps, as deeply grieved at the other alternative—a supposition of fickleness and want of feeling in him—she vainly strove to rouse herself.

To the anxious inquiries of the Raymonds and of Margaret and her brother, she could truly say, that her head ached terribly, but that she was not otherwise ill. She eagerly resisted Edward's proposal to travel with her, and satisfied them at last that the drive home would probably do her good, and that her maid would be her best companion on the journey.

She arrived at home, and there was comfort in being unmolested even by affectionate sympathy. Mrs. Walter believed in the headache and was satisfied ; and Walter was so much occupied with his parish that he had no time for observation.

But Lucy, in truth, was not the only sufferer, nor were her suspicions of Mrs. Berkeley well founded. There was deepening gloom at the old Manorial Hall ; for Mrs. Berkeley's spirits were crushed. One son was lost to her for ever ; and

George—her best loved George—was restless, and almost irritable at times.

The dread of the wiles of the fascinating, unprincipled Lady Brendon came pressing on her with greater force. She lay on her sofa pondering over the past, pondering over her own mad interference, which had lost to her a daughter-in-law such as her heart now yearned after with intense longing; the image of Lucy, as she had seen her watching over Agnes Spencer, was constantly before her. What had her son's strange repulse meant when she named her to him? What but that his heart was occupied by another attachment—an unhallowed love—that could only lead to misery for himself and for all who cared for him! and again came the bitter thought, "*It was my doing!*"

George Berkeley sat reading; his mother lay near him on the sofa, her eyes resting anxiously on him. Oh! how she loved him! through all her pride and worldliness she loved this son; nay, *with* her very pride and worldliness as well as with her heart! She *must* speak to him, she *must* know the worst—it was better than to be constantly harassed by her fears.

She determined to dash into the subject at once.

"Love and marriage are not often our topics, George, but they shall be to-day," she began.

“ I want you to marry. It is time that we should think and talk about it.”

George gave a little start ; his brow contracted : he was silent for a few minutes, as if struggling against angry feelings, and then said,

“ As you remark, love and marriage are not often our topics, and very wisely so. I have no intention of marrying. Let us talk of something less foolish and missish : we never want pleasant and useful subjects for conversation when we are together.”

Mrs. Berkeley was repulsed ; and she had the sense to find it out, and to see that it was her only wisdom to let the subject drop.

CHAPTER XXV.

As I said before, every lively interest seemed suddenly removed from Hulse Parsonage ; there stood the empty house, with its high wall, which was useless now, for the recluse had escaped ; but he came once more to visit it, and once more he was sitting by Lucy at the Parsonage. Mrs. Walter left them alone. In Lucy's happy, excited manner she saw but one thing ; Arthur Colville was evidently her declared lover.

And so they could sit and talk together undisturbed, and it seemed to him as if he could have spoken for ever to the one friend—the only one who knew all the truth. He had come to take leave of Hulse House ; he was going abroad to Agnes and her father, and he and Agnes were soon to be married ; and then there was before him a hope of returning to England, and redeeming something of the past by living in future an active,

useful life, in his own country home, with Agnes to cheer and encourage him in what was right.

But as yet, all this was vague. His mind had received a great shock, and what had befallen him was too new and too serious for careless words or thoughts. He was as a man but just released from a long and painful captivity, and he neither could nor would forget the evils from which he had escaped, and the mercies he had received. He had not only regained his liberty, but for the first time the blessing of religious hope and belief was granted to him. His words, his looks, the very tones of his voice were suited to the deep sense of gratitude that these blessings had called forth.

Lucy saw this and she was satisfied. He came to take leave of her ; he was not to see her again till he returned to England as the husband of Agnes. He looked round at the familiar room, at the large spreading elm on the grass plot where he and Lucy had so often sat together.

“ It is like a dream as yet ” he said ; “ it is only when I am with her that I believe in the truth of what has happened. And yet that dreary house, which I must now go and look at, is still more unreal to me ! It is a strange, bewildering dream altogether,” and his voice became very sad ; but

then he spoke of another hope, which was now a reality to him, and there was seriousness, but no sadness in his voice, and so he and Lucy parted. The lonely, repining, gloomy recluse was gone for ever ! It was unconsciously to her, but his recovery had in truth been chiefly Lucy's work. The interest which Lucy felt in him and in Agnes, was a fortunate diversion just now from her own distress at George Berkeley's strange and cruel conduct ; but at the old baronial hall, Mrs. Berkeley had no such interest to lessen her anxiety. She scarcely retained a doubt that her son's fancied, fleeting attachment to Lucy was at an end, and that his affections were given where she most dreaded. Lady Brendon had evidently entangled him in her wiles, and her son was lost to her for ever.

One day as her mind was working on this distressing probability, the post came in. She and George were together in her pretty morning sitting room. As she took her own letters from the waiter, her heart sickened with the seeming confirmation of her fears as she saw the direction of one of the other letters. There were the marked, flowing, yet decided characters of Lady Brendon's handwriting.

Mrs. Berkeley pretended not to observe her son, and opened her own letters, but she determined

secretly to watch his countenance as he read. She could not see which letter he first opened ; there were two or three ; but her self-torturing inquisitiveness was punished. George Berkeley's face became first pale, then it was crimsoned over with strong excitement, and as Mrs. Berkeley thought, with sudden—alas ! was it guilty joy ! In another moment he left the room. Ah ! then it was indeed true !

Mrs. Berkeley sank back on her sofa, and a few tears slowly forced themselves down her cheeks. Tears were not common with her ; they were a silly weakness ; but now these bitter tears forced themselves down her care-worn face. “I have been his ruin !” was the wretched thought that brought them there.

In about an hour's time, or it might have been much longer, for Mrs. Berkeley's thoughts had been busy within her, George Berkeley came again into his mother's room. What could it be ! There was surely no guilt in the radiant face that met her eyes ! her George was himself once more ! himself as he had been before all this sorrow—her own bright, handsome son.

“Mother, why not go out this lovely morning ?” he said. “ You stay here day after day, moping yourself into illness. Let me order the pony car-

riage, and I will drive you," and then he leant his hand on her shoulder and stooped down and gave her a kiss, and said, "After all, you are a dear good old mother, though you do care a little too much about your son."

"Not a fraction, not an atom too much, my own George!" was the vehement answer, with a loving pressure of his hand, and such a glow at her heart as she had not felt since her sorrows had begun with the death of her eldest son.

CHAPTER XXVI.

MRS. WALTER and Lucy were in the drawing-room at Hulse Parsonage, and Lucy's eyes were resting on the pretty bright view from the bay window. But her thoughts were busy elsewhere. Agnes Spencer was before her in fancy as she had seen her first at Digby Manor.

What a long time back it seemed in her life. It was really but a few years, and yet how eventful in feeling those years had been to them both; and then Lucy thought of Arthur Colville on his first visit to their house, how cold, and proud, and ungenial he was.

But just then, very suddenly, Lucy was recalled to herself—the door was opened—a name was announced—and George Berkeley was in the room. If he was agitated, Lucy had no power of observing him, or scarcely of seeing or hearing anything that was passing for some time. All she could do

was to sit still, battling against her own overpowering emotion.

George Berkeley sat down by Mrs. Walter. He was uttering commonplaces. He was quite unlike himself. He was ill at ease.

But as Lucy became calmer, the idea that he was come as a mere acquaintance in cold-blooded heartlessness, roused her indignation and her womanly pride. She, too, would be calm and indifferent. She turned towards him coldly and civilly with an inquiry whether he was staying at Digby Manor, and a hope that Mr. and Mrs. Digby were well. In after times she wondered how she could have spoken those words, and she knew how harsh and sharp her voice sounded as she uttered them.

George Berkeley started as she spoke,—he looked at her—he coloured—he did not make any answer for an instant. At last he said quickly, that he was not at the Digbys; he was just come—he could not stay long. There was a silence, but luckily Mrs. Walter Crofton, glad of the opportunity for talking, chimed in with a string of questions and remarks, and there was time to recover composure.

At last Mr. Berkeley got up and said, as he looked out of the window—

“It is a beautiful day. I know you often sit out of doors,” and turning expressly to Lucy, he added: “Will you allow me to go with you to see the roses?”

For an instant there was such deep indignation at Lucy’s heart, that she was about to give a short, rude refusal to his request, but then she remembered that it might be possible that he wished to offer some explanation of his conduct. “I will go with him! Let him excuse himself if he can,” was her thought, and she said aloud that she would go for her bonnet. She soon returned prepared for this strange walk.

George Berkeley scarcely spoke till they reached the seats under the large elm tree, where in former times she and Arthur Colville had often sat and talked together. Lucy exerted herself to be proudly calm, but she felt that she could not have walked a step farther. She sank down, thankful to be seated.

“I came here to-day,” said George Berkeley, as he sat down by her, “to show you a letter from

Miss Spencer. She refers me to you for particulars of a strange, a very interesting secret, which she confided to me. Here is her letter."

Lucy took the letter which he handed to her.

"I have always thought of you as a true friend," Agnes wrote, "and I am now going to give a proof of my confidence by entrusting you with a secret which is of the deepest interest to me. You have heard me speak of the recluse of Hulse House, but you little guessed when I talked so lightly about him, that every worldly wish and affection of mine were centred upon him. This recluse, calling himself Arthur Colville, was in fact, Arthur Cleveland, and thanks to those dearest and best of friends, Walter and Lucy Crofton, Arthur and I are restored to one another, and before long I am to become his wife.

"The mystery of his seclusion and change of name, and identity with Mr. Colville of Hulse House will, I trust, never be publicly known. Besides yourself, the secret is at present confided alone to my father, and to Walter and Lucy Crofton. Go to Lucy, and she will give you the history of my misery, and of our reconciliation, and when we meet I must tell you (for she will not) the history

of our deep obligations to her and to her brother. We owe everything under God to them. I am not yet well, but so happy, that I think I shall soon recover.”

When George Berkeley saw that Lucy had finished reading, he said—

“ That letter relieved me from great distress.”

Lucy looked at him, and her face said “ Why ? ” but her lips uttered nothing.

He went on gravely, and with more composure, as if he had schooled himself into calmness.

“ You do not ask me why this letter relieved me from great distress, and I see that I was mistaken in my supposition. I came here daring to hope—daring again to think of meeting you. But your reception shows me that I was under a delusion, and that your promise is still binding—that some other.....”

Lucy looked up. She said as quietly as she could, “ I do not understand what this letter has to do with our meeting ? ”

George Berkeley looked hurt.

“ No, indeed,” he said ; “ I see it has nothing to do with it ! I was deceived by my own hopes.

I grieve that I should have disturbed you—I must apologise," and his voice became cold and stiff. He got up—he was going. Lucy felt turned into stone; she did not understand him, and yet she could not speak to ask him what he meant. He would leave her, and perhaps she would never again have the power of explanation.

But he lingered; it seemed as if the idea of a separation was equally painful to him. He went a few paces, and then returned.

"Miss Crofton," he said, "I cannot go away with this horrible mystery unsolved. Forgive me if I wound you—if I have misunderstood you. I must speak out! It is nothing new to tell you of my love; you know it well! and you can guess something of my misery when I left you that day—having come to you, daring to believe in your affection, and in the truth, and goodness, and simplicity of your character, and parting from you with those terrible words to haunt me—that your faith was promised to another! Every word and every look of yours in that meeting is engraved on my heart! Some strange—some terrible barrier

had arisen between us ; and yet, fool that I was, I left you, still believing that you loved me !”

He paused a moment to recover from his agitation ; he went on in a sadder voice.

“ Yes, in spite of the mystery—in spite of those words that constantly haunted me, ‘ that you had promised’—what or to whom I never knew—I retained my belief in your love.”

He stopped again, as if unwilling to go on, and then added with effort—

“ It must be told—forgive me if I pain you by telling it—I was very soon informed that you were secretly engaged to marry another person.”

Lucy started, and now for the first time looked up ; a gleam of joy stole over her face. George Berkeley did not observe it. He had half covered his face, as if unwilling to watch the effect of his words.

“ Yes,” he said, “ I was told this confidently. At first I would not believe it—I *could* not. But proof after proof seemed to thicken upon me, and I owned that I had been deceived, and that my trust in your goodness and integrity had been greater..... but no !.....” he checked himself; “ I must not

say this. Why do I dare to reproach you?" He continued more quietly. "At this very time when as it seemed to me there was no doubt left of your engagement to Mr. Colville, my mother told me that she knew and admired you."

He paused again, as if dwelling with pain on the recollection of what had passed between them; then rousing himself he said—

"But pray forgive me, Miss Crofton—estranged as we are by your promise to another, why do I speak to you of my feelings? When I saw you at the Raymonds, as I thought, no longer the innocent, truthful being I had loved, but one who half owning love for me had engaged herself to marry another....."

He was going on vehemently, but he checked himself again.

"I forget myself," he said; "I forget that this letter which in my folly I imagined had cleared away every doubt, has, in truth, left me with a greater certainty of evil, although it is an unknown and mysterious one. Your *promise* remains—to *whom*, I am alone ignorant. As I read this letter, I believed that you were free, and with this idea I

came to you at once. Your coldness in a moment would have convinced me of my mistake, even if you had not spoken a word ! I see my folly ! Still let me know the truth. I have spoken without reserve—let me plead for equal openness from you. Hard, cruel as the truth may be, let me hear it. Tell me if you have promised your faith, and I will leave you when I hear from your own lips that I ought to do so."

He stopped—he looked at Lucy for an answer ; she tried to speak, she murmured something—it was scarcely audible ; but it was enough to satisfy George Berkeley that he had no rival in her affections ; her hand was seized ; it was pressed in his, it was kissed with rapture. Explanations followed—we need not enter into them ; he had believed that she was engaged to Mr. Colville, and when this was proved to be untrue, her coldness of manner made him fear that her promise referred to some other person ; but as soon as Lucy's agitation lessened, the delightful fact was revealed to him, that she had always loved him, and none but him.

We will not repeat the mutual confessions that

succeeded. Lucy at length recollected that it was time to return to the house.

"What would Mrs. Walter think of their long conference?"

"Let her think the truth," said George Berkeley, "that this half hour has been the happiest of my life. You will not be ashamed of owning me as your lover, will you?"

Lucy blushed and smiled.

"But you must be the one to tell Mrs. Crofton," he added; "if I must leave you to-day, let me go away with your voice as the last sound in my ears. I would not for the world break the spell, by hearing a word from any other human being, after those precious ones I have just listened to from you. But you will let me come early to-morrow, will you not? To-morrow I will talk to your brother and Mrs. Crofton, if they will let me. Ah! they do not half know what a treasure I wish to carry away from them!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

"WHAT a very long visit Mr. Berkeley paid," was Mrs. Walter's remark, as Lucy came into the drawing-room. "I was coming out, but really I was so busy with my accounts I could not find time, and he was so odd and stiff? I suppose he thought himself too much of a fine gentleman to be civil to me."

Lucy could hardly help laughing outright, but a little merry "oh!" was all she said. She wished her brother to be told of her happiness before she confided it to Mrs. Walter. It was too new for her half to understand it as yet.

But that George Berkeley had asked her to be his wife; that she had pledged herself to him; and that she was to see him again on the morrow, was all real, and might be sweetly pondered over when

alone in her own room. While dressing for dinner, she might calm herself down into the conviction that no lover ever declared his affection with words of more fitness and propriety, and no woman ever had a better excuse than herself for undying constancy. But what a series of accidents and blunders it had been ; her jealousy of Margaret Raymond—his jealousy of Mr. Colville ; their strange meeting, and now—ah, what a happy *now* that was !

Lucy was very abstracted and forgetful at dinner, and Mrs. Walter remarked that she ate nothing.

When Walter went as usual to his study, for an hour's quiet reading in the evening, Lucy whispered to him, “ May I come to you ? ”

“ Oh ! certainly,” was his reply ; and Lucy followed him with a beating heart. She could not suppose any objections on his part, for he had always seemed to like Mr. Berkeley peculiarly, but she was afraid he might show a great deal of surprise. When, with many blushes and a good deal of hesitation, she had blundered out her tale, Walter’s very hearty approval, and his warm affectionate “ God bless you, my dear Lucy ! ” as he fondly kissed her, were perfectly satisfactory.

After a little serious conversation with him, she returned to the drawing-room, with less perturbation for the task of telling her sister-in-law. Her flushed face excited Mrs. Walter's attention.

"What can be the matter, Lucy?" she exclaimed. "I am sure you have been poking about amongst those great heavy books of Walter's, reading some dry trash—enough to make any one's face red—a very bad habit just after dinner, as I always tell Walter. A little colour does not look ill, but if you are always getting on those deep learned questions in the evening, there is no saying whether it will not bring on a high fixed colour, which is just a thing I hate. It looks so commonplace!"

Lucy laughed, and then came out with her confession; "I have been telling Walter some news," she said.

Mrs. Walter started and coloured.

"My dear Lucy, my dear Lucy! Tell me quickly!" she exclaimed. "But I know what it is!"

Lucy fancied she had really guessed the truth, and she said, "I think I need not tell you, for it seems that Mr. Berkeley's visit here....."

"Mr. Berkeley!" screamed in Mrs. Walter.

“ George Berkeley ! Lucy, my *dear Lucy* !” and she was silent, struck dumb with pleasant astonishment, and Lucy went on to tell her of Mr. Berkeley’s proposal, and his wish that she and Walter should be informed of it, and that Walter’s consent to their marriage should be asked. Before she had finished, Mrs. Walter had regained her powers of speech, and her delight was even greater than Lucy quite desired.

“ Mr. Berkeley ! the eldest son !—so agreeable, too, and so handsome, and a thorough man of the world !—and the place, Berkeley Manor ! such a splendid place ! I always told Walter you would marry well !—and I am so pleased !—and it is all our doing, owing to taking you to dear Mr. and Mrs. Digby’s. Mr. Berkeley, indeed ! the most agreeable man in London, Mrs. Digby says, and I always agreed with her ! And so it was in the flower-garden he spoke out, was it ? Yes, Walter objected to those chairs on the lawn, but I always insisted on it they were well placed—and now you see ! But.....” and Mrs. Walter’s thoughts took a distressing turn. She looked perplexed and rather annoyed. “ My dear Lucy, what will Mr. Col-

ville do? I really am very sorry for poor Mr. Colville."

"Mr. Colville!" said Lucy, and she smiled. "Oh, Mr. Colville will take care of himself! I am not at all sorry for him," she added, half-absently, for she was thinking not only of her own happiness, but of Agnes Spencer's.

"Certainly," said Mrs. Walter, "he deserves it; he was so very long about it."

"Yes," said Lucy, without any clear idea of what Mrs. Walter could mean.

"But," added Mrs. Walter, "what will he say when he hears of your engagement? He depended so much on you!"

"Oh!" said Lucy, "it need make very little difference."

"Very little difference!" thought Mrs. Walter. "This is a very cool way of viewing it!"

"Indeed," added Lucy, "I hope we shall see him very often!"

Mrs. Walter positively stared. Though Mr. Colville was a recluse, could Lucy suppose that he would like to be constantly meeting the woman he loved when she was engaged to another?

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MRS. WALTER CROFTON was living in a perpetual state of excitement. No sooner had Lucy's engagement been announced, than a new and most extraordinary romance was revealed to her, in strict confidence.

She received a letter from Mr. Colville. "Ah ! poor man, here it is then !" she said to herself ; and as she broke the seal she was inventing all the proper phrases of comfort and condolence towards unhappy lovers who declared their love for daughters, sisters, or nieces, too late to be of any use. She looked with a kindly, pitying eye, on the handwriting, and before she was fairly seated for the perusal of the letter, she had concocted a very prettily-turned condolatory reply to his proposal

for Lucy. What then was her amazement, when pity had to give place to congratulations ; when the broken-hearted recluse, the rejected lover of Lucy, turned out to be the rich, prosperous Mr. Cleveland, of Cleveland Park, the accepted lover of the beautiful Miss Spencer, and besides all this, that to her was confided a secret of which even Miss Walcott was to be kept in ignorance.

"All I can say, my dear Lucy," said Mrs. Walter to her afterwards, "all I can say is, that I never was so much surprised in my life ! What with this and what with that, it is just like a thing in a novel ; and I don't know who or what to believe next ! How astonished Miss Walcott would be if she knew !"

"Why did you come to Raymond House," asked Lucy next day, when she and George Berkeley were sitting together on those very chairs out of doors that Mrs. Walter was sure had brought about the proposal, "Why did you come to Raymond House ? You knew I was there."

"Yes," said George Berkeley, "but I wished to see you once more before you were severed from

me for ever by your marriage with Mr. Colville. I thought I could bear it with equanimity. I intended to meet you with friendly civility. I had planned a form of speech in which I meant to address you ; it was extremely courteous, but very sarcastic, for I was too proud to allow you to perceive how much I was wounded by your inconstancy. You saw how my pride and my civility succeeded ! Nothing could have been a greater failure.”

“ Nay,” said Lucy, “ your cold, sarcastic manner was perfect.”

George Berkeley laughed, and added, “ I expected to see you at dinner, and I would not let myself believe that your absence arose from feeling. I rather decided that you wished to show your utter indifference to me by not coming down to meet me at once. During dinner time I worked myself up to a state of indignant hardness ; and angry jealousy was my predominant feeling when I saw you in the drawing-room. I was extremely amiable, was I not ? The perfect model of a high-minded, ill-used lover ! Will you forgive me ?”

“ I hardly know,” said Lucy, smiling. “ You

made me so utterly uncomfortable ; and I had been entertaining a silly vision of some little satisfaction in your society that evening.”

“ Had you ? Did you really believe that I still cared for you ? What did you think of my countenance ?”

“ I only looked at you once,” said Lucy, “ for your expression was anything rather than benign.”

George Berkeley laughed again. Lucy’s hand was resting confidently in his, and he could afford to laugh now. He retorted—

“ And how was it you looked so sternly at me, and spoke so sharply to me, when I ventured to call here ?”

Lucy could not help laughing, though she shuddered still as she remembered her feelings, and how strange her voice must have sounded as she inquired so civilly after the Digbys.

Mrs. Walter Crofton stood a good deal in awe of Mr. Berkeley, so that she was cheerful but unobtrusive as he sat with them that evening. He talked for some time to Walter, and then he felt he deserved a reward for having given his attention

to anything but Lucy for half the evening: so, at last, he spoke of music.

"Lucy generally plays or sings to us," said Mrs. Walter.

George Berkeley's eyes turned towards Lucy, with rather a confident appeal to her obligingness. She got up, and he followed her to the instrument. She played a few airs from Beethoven.

"Now," said George Berkeley, "there is a song I may at length ask to hear again, one I have been earnestly longing to hear for very long. Do you know which it is? Do you remember our last walk at Fernmere? Did you keep your promise?"

Lucy's "Yes" was scarcely needed.

"Did you repent," he said, "those delightful words that gave me hope? though I do not believe you intended to have uttered them. Do you remember saying that you could not bear to sing it when I was absent?"

Lucy blushed and laughed.

"Why will you remind me of all my blunders?" said she. "I heartily repented of having uttered those words as soon as they had fallen from my lips."

"Yes, but you did not refuse to stay out a

little longer with me!" added George Berkeley.
"Oh! that lake! those mountains! that dear
little boat! What if we ask to go there some
time? you can guess when! to be quite alone
there."

"Oh!" said Lucy, with a short joyful exclama-
tion, "that would be perfect!" and then she
blushed at her own words.

"Nay," said her lover, "do not be ashamed of
your kindness! Let me be happy in thinking
that my happiness will be yours."

CHAPTER XXIX.

NEXT day the little light figure of Lucy was seen gaily tripping over the fields that led to Woodbine Cottage.

“ Come in, Rosebud,” said the little lady, as Lucy appeared at the door, “ come in. Bless me ! Roses and lilies, and all the rest of it ! What is it, child ? that colour does not come for nothing.”

Lucy took hold of Miss Walcott’s hand in both of hers, as she stooped down to kiss her.

“ Guess !” she said, “ guess what I have to tell !”

“ Guess ! hem !” said Miss Walcott, “ it is not very difficult to find out what is to be guessed. Who is it, child ?—that is all ! Do I know him ? Shall I like him ?” For a moment Miss Walcott looked anxious, and but half pleased.

" Cannot you guess ?" said Lucy, softly. Have you never thought—never perceived?....."

" Now, child," said Miss Walcott, crossly, " how should I perceive ? I am too old for guessing—tell me at once ! though I suppose I know as well as you can tell me ;" and she half sighed. " I suppose I know, and I hope you will be happy together."

Lucy looked disappointed for a moment at Miss Walcott's absence of enthusiasm. The little lady repeated, " I hope you will be happy together ; but, child, why did he shut himself up ? What excuse does he make for that ?"

" Shut himself up !" said Lucy. " Mr. Berkeley shut himself up !"

" Mr. Berkeley !" exclaimed little Miss Walcott, half springing up out of her chair, seizing hold of Lucy, and giving her a vehement kiss, first on one cheek and then on the other. " Mr. Berkeley ! my tall, clever friend ! George Berkeley ! Why, child, I could dance a jig ! Did not I think you were going to tell me it was the Hulse House man, and could not I have cried, or gone into a passion with you for looking so happy, all because of a man

who went and did that sort of thing. Poor soul ! I pitied him for all that. But let us think no more of it ! George Berkeley, child ! Why, he is just after my own heart. I never spoke to a pleasanter man ; and so good-looking, too ! and there is no harm in that.

“ Now sit down, Lucy, and let me look at you, and think it all over. I never was so well pleased in my life ! Tell me all about it, from beginning to end—from the first ‘ how do you do ? ’ to the last blush. Poor little Rosebud ! and you loved him, child !—you loved him when you were so ill ? ”

Lucy laid her blushing face gently against the kind old lady’s pale, withered cheek—her voice faltered.

“ I loved him then,” she said softly, “ but I thought we should never meet again.”

“ Poor child, poor child ! I thought as much, though I did not know who it was ; ” and the little lady’s eyes had tears in them, and she spoke very tenderly, and kissed Lucy again.

Lucy related to her something of her past sorrow and her past difficulties ; as much, in fact,

as she could safely tell without revealing the secret of Mrs. Berkeley's letter. Miss Walcott listened eagerly ; and she and Lucy talked together for a long time. Their conversation was grave and earnest. Lucy had no mother, and ever since her illness Miss Walcott had been to her like a mother, and she could speak of her feelings without any fear that they would be misunderstood.

Marriage is a solemn thing ; and though Lucy was very happy, hers was not the light, inconsiderate happiness of childish carelessness—it was rather that of a thoughtful woman, who had felt what sorrow was, and who knew that sorrow would probably come again. It was the happiness of a being who felt that each portion of her life had its responsibilities and its cares ; and that each portion, whether happy or unhappy, was but a part of that whole, which would seal her fate, when the world and the things of the world had passed away.

The exciting joy of the last few hours wanted the relief of such a conversation as she now held with her kind friend. It gave certainty and security to it.

There was more than gravity; there was solemnity in the thoughts and words of both as they sat there—old and young—sympathising as completely as if that space of years did not exist between them, and as if the one whose face was now old and wrinkled, and the other whose cheeks were so fresh, and dimpled, and blooming, were both equals and contemporaries, looking on as they did from this very short span of years, to the endless years of the eternity which was before them both.

CHAPTER XXX.

“ THERE is one thing,” said George Berkeley to Lucy, during one of their private conversations, during that happy week, “ there is one thing I do not yet understand. I have been too happy to think about it ; but what did you mean by saying ‘ You had promised ? ’ What was it, or to whom ? ”

“ You must not ask me about it,” said Lucy, looking pained and confused at the sudden difficulty of answering. “ It is the only secret that I cannot entrust to you.”

A slight shade came over her lover’s face ; he was silent for a minute, and then said—

“ A secret ! and with some one that I must not know ! Who can this man be who has had such

power over you, that his secret is still to be kept from me?"

"Nay, it was a woman," said Lucy; "and for her sake I fear I must not tell you."

George Berkeley's face cleared, and he pressed Lucy's hand tenderly.

"Why did I speak so hastily!" he said. "I, who can trust you through anything! I will never ask about it again, so long as it does not make you break another promise," he added; "another—I drew from you not long since." And so it passed off, but Lucy had been troubled about it.

But this slight annoyance was soon removed, for Mrs. Berkeley made a thorough confession to her son. There was, at first, a slight struggle between his habitual reverence for his mother and his indignation at her conduct, but Mrs. Berkeley's noble way of owning her fault, and trying to repair it, and her very hearty approval of his engagement to Lucy smoothed the difficulty of making him overlook what had at first so deeply grieved him. Besides which, the circumstance added such lustre to Lucy's character, that George Berkeley could scarcely be angry at anything which gave him a clearer insight into her perfections.

And so this shadow of distress was not allowed to interfere with their happiness.

When Lucy first accepted him, George Berkeley, with the full concurrence of Lucy, had offered that his mother should make her home with them at Berkeley Manor ; but Mrs. Berkeley wisely declined.

“ No,” she said, “ let it be your home and your wife’s, as it ought to be. These arrangements, begun on the gush of the moment, never answer ! I will visit you as often as you please, but my home shall be in London. It is the best place for old maids and dowagers. I like it, and it likes me. I will not stay at Berkeley Manor to be the incumbrance—the old-fashioned furniture that is to be looked on as a riddance when it can be safely packed off. But I am vain enough to have no fear of being an unwelcome guest, or rather I should say I love you dearly enough, and think too highly of you, to doubt your affection for a moment.”

George Berkeley’s warm kiss told his mother she was right.

Mrs. Berkeley had never acted or spoken with

more truth, or with more wisdom. In after years, mistrust never crept into the domestic circle at Berkeley Manor. Lucy's ready comprehension, her nice tact, her gracefulness of mind and person, won Mrs. Berkeley's worldly approval; and the higher qualities of her character worked their way insensibly to her heart, softening, elevating, and ennobling it. Mrs. Berkeley's fine stately figure was not less grand—her keen, gray eyes were not less piercing—but there was a softened tone, a graver, but a happier expression, on her still beautiful countenance; and the playful, petting fondness she lavished on Lucy, was mingled with even respectful admiration of her goodness. This affection was repaid with genuine love and respect. The dreaded mother of her George, who had once nearly broken her heart, was in after times welcomed to their home with unfeigned pleasure, both by Lucy and her husband.

Barker Preston must not be forgotten. Lucy had written to him herself to announce her engagement. With what reverence, yet with what dread did Barker Preston open the letter, when he saw it was in Lucy's handwriting. He had never

received a real letter from her before ; he had sometimes had little notes written to save trouble to Mrs. Walter. These notes, mere invitations or commissions from Mrs. Crofton, were treasured up and preserved for the sake of the hand that had penned them. And now came another letter—not a mere note, that was unimportant in itself, but one written by her, and conveying to him intelligence which he had long expected, and long, unselfishly, even hoped to hear, and yet as long dreaded and trembled to have announced to him.

And now it was done delicately—kindly, most kindly — Lucy's considerate friendship dictated both the thoughts and the expressions. Barker Preston loved the letter, he loved every word ; and yet when he had read it he laid it down ; he covered his face with his hands, and he sobbed like a child.

“ It is come at last ! it is come at last ! ” he thought. “ And I believed that I should have been glad ! and she wrote herself ! dear, kind Lucy Crofton, never forgetting others, not even me, poor unworthy Barker Preston ! ”

He sobbed again ; he took up the letter, he

kissed it; and then ashamed of having dared to do so, he folded it neatly up, and laid it by.

“I must write to her; she shall not know that I am grieved. I would not wilfully cause her a moment’s pain in the midst of the happiest time of her life.”

He tried to write; but as he began, another burst of tears stopped him.

“This won’t do!” he said to himself. “A little fresh air will be best, and then I will send her a very comfortable letter.” So he took his hat and wandered out, and raved against his own selfishness, and when he came in, he wrote the following letter, which was immediately sent to Lucy.

“MY DEAR MISS CROFTON—

“Your goodness and your kindness are always the same, beyond any other person’s, and your letter will be for ever valued as a proof of your recollection of me at a time when you might have been only occupied with your own happiness. I am not clever enough to write as I wish, but plain words will tell you that I pray for a blessing on you in your new home, and that I rejoice for

you with all the heartiness of an old friend. I am going away for a few months, and so I must now say good-bye, and may God bless Mr. Berkeley and you. I could not have trusted you to any other person, but I can do so to him without a misgiving.

“Your sincere friend,

“BARKER PRESTON.”

Lucy showed the letter to George Berkeley.

“You see what he thinks of you,” she said smiling. “Dear, good Mr. Preston!” added she, “I wish he was not going away.”

George Berkeley said nothing, but he had divined the truth. The only kindness that it lay in his power to render him was to keep his secret from Lucy. Had she discovered it, it must have slightly destroyed the unconscious, affectionate friendliness which she had hitherto shown and felt for him, and which it would have grieved him to have seen in any way diminished.

A characteristic letter from London soon followed the first one to Lucy; he said he had tried in vain to get any wedding present that was worthy of her, excepting a Bible! He had ordered

a large handsomely bound one to be sent to Berkeley Manor with a carved oak stand on which it was to rest. This was to gratify a particular fancy of his own, that there should be a large Bible on a desk in the usual sitting-room in every house.

“ We are none of us too ready to read our Bible,” he often said; “ we want tempting to it, and I like to have one always before our eyes, that we may pick up a good text or two to spend the day with if we choose.”

“ You have not told us,” said my sister Martha, “ what were the contents of the letter received by Mr. George Berkeley from that wicked Lady Brendon.”

“ That letter,” I replied, “ contained important inquiries about the character of a coachman, especially as to his sobriety. I regret to have to add, that the letter from Agnes Spencer, which George Berkeley received by the same post, put him in such high spirits, that he ascribed every virtue to the coachman, who in the first and last week of his service, got so drunk as to upset Lady Brendon on her way from Lady A——’s ball.”

CHAPTER XXXI.

I MUST transport my readers to a foreign watering-place, that we may once more see Agnes Spencer and her father. There is a great change in Agnes : she is no longer the restless, whimsical being she was, although she is often as gay as ever. Mr. Spencer was much aged, for his anxiety about his daughter had told severely upon him. He watched her with pleasure, and yet often with a startling fear, and indeed the brilliancy of her complexion might have startled even a common observer.

As the letters come in, and Agnes seizes one from Lucy, we can see that she is still the same eager, enthusiastic Agnes Spencer as of old. Arthur Cleveland is sitting with them. He is still grave, and even sad. but when his eyes rest on Agnes, his

smile, and the expression on his face, remove every fear of his being either stern, or unhappy.

As Agnes opened Lucy's letter, she gave a joyful exclamation: the letter brought the news of Lucy's engagement to George Berkeley.

"This is more pleasant, and more unexpected than anything I ever heard," said Agnes. "How could I have been so dull as not to find it out long ago! What a great deal of trouble it would have saved me!" she said, blushing, and smiling as she looked up at Arthur Cleveland.

"I am very glad that Mr. Cleveland and Miss Spencer are likely to make a happy couple," said my sister Martha, "but I think we may safely suppose that there will be a happier one at Berkeley Manor."

"Pray, brother, tell us whether there are any more misadventures," joined in my sister Jane, "perhaps an unknown rival?—a duel? People sometimes insisted on fighting duels. I know it is very wicked—every one says so now—but in the good old times no one thought much of it—but then to be sure there was more excuse for it in

those days as heroines were much more beautiful thirty years ago!"

Unluckily for the interest of my story, Lucy's beauty was so much of the modern stamp, that it called forth no murderously-minded rival to George Berkeley ; and in a few months after that agitating interview in the garden at Hulse Parsonage, when he and Lucy found out their various blunders and misunderstandings, their marriage took place. Not even a voice was heard resounding through the aisles of the church to forbid the banns, and in fact they were married by special licence in the parish church at Hulse. The Hulse House pew, once so provokingly empty, with its row of red cushions resting undisturbed all round it, was now crammed full of people to see the wedding.

Walter Crofton read the marriage' service very impressively ; Edward Crofton gave away the bride, and as Lucy had no near relations to claim the privilege of being her bridesmaids, the earnest request of little Mary and Annie Wilton was granted, and they officiated with all proper dignity in that capacity.

To make the whole thing perfect, Mr. and Mrs. Wilton goodnaturedly lent Fernmere for the honeymoon. How often Lucy and her husband rowed on the lake, how often they stayed out by moonlight, and caught cold whilst gazing at the stars, I do not pretend to say.

George Berkeley insisted upon seeing the very rock where Lucy sat when she overheard the conversation between himself and Clara Wilton ; but they could not laugh over that conversation now, for Frederick Berkeley was dead, and Clara Wilton's pale, sad face, still often haunted Lucy, even in the midst of her own married happiness.

"Indeed, brother," said my sister Jane, "I am thankful everything went off so well."

Yes, said I, and it was not long before the bells were ringing merrily in the village belonging to Berkeley Manor, as Lucy Berkeley—Lucy Crofton no more—walked into the old manorial hall leaning on her husband's arm.

It was a calm, sunny evening, and the old gray stones of the house rested as peacefully as ever,

whilst the bells clattered on with their jangling peals.

I will not repeat all the pretty speeches that George Berkeley made to his wife, on the advantages of having her in his home, and on the great improvement that her presence made in the cheerfulness of the house, but only say that the evening passed very happily, and next morning they had the pleasure of a visit to Raymond House, where they found Edward and Margaret, with Lord and Lady Raymond and Ellen.

“ Ah ! little lady !” said Lord Raymond, “ to Lucy, “ I hope you are come to confess your sins to me, for letting me twaddle on about the merits of our neighbour, as if you had never heard of him, or seen him before ; I sent you to bed with a bad headache, as I thought, and it was nothing but a heartache after all !”

CHAPTER XXXII.

ONE morning as the post came in at Berkeley Manor there was a foreign letter for Lucy. As she opened it she exclaimed with pleasure as her eye caught sight of the signatures. George Berkeley leant over her to look.

"I think I can guess what they were," said my sister Jane, smiling and giving a gentle sigh. Arthur Cleveland—Agnes Cleveland."

"Exactly," said I; "and as you complain that there is not half enough of romance in my story, and a sad deficiency of pretty sentiments and well-expressed morals, I will try my best to give you one at last drawn from the curious fact that—

A ray of the morning sun happened to fall

on those very words as George Berkeley and Lucy sat together looking at them. It was an accidental gleam, but it serves well to moralize upon.

Agnes Spencer was a happy wife ; the gloomy Hulse House recluse was the husband of the woman of his early love, and the sunshine of those two lives was chiefly owing to the goodness of Lucy Crofton.

An extract from Agnes Cleveland's letter to Lucy may almost close my story.

"Think of us," she said, as sitting together ; "no more dull, lonely twilights and long, dreary evenings for Arthur, but both of us happy, very happy, in our different ways. Arthur, it is true, has none of my exuberantly merry nature, and as yet he cannot rejoice as I do. I must laugh *at* him and *with* him, and pet him, and scold him, and spoil him till I get him to believe that he is good enough for the blessing of having me as his wife ; and if this fails, Lucy, I will try what a little plaguing and provoking will do, to convince him that his wife is not too good for him !

"Lucy don't be frightened because I write so

lightly! I am happy, oh! so very happy, that I cannot take my happiness as calmly as you sober-minded people do, but I can say it thankfully I am not thoughtless or inconsiderate, only I *know* that I am happy and my joy *will* burst out.

“ My dear husband’s nature is less buoyant than mine ; he wants time to calm down from the agitation and sorrow he has gone through ; he is more sensitive, more morbid perhaps, but we have both one faith and one hope, and so Lucy, happy or unhappy in our worldly future, all is well for us.....

“ You ask about Hodson, dear good Hodson ; whilst we *honeymoon* he is gone to England to see his friends and to prepare Cleveland Park for our reception. Do you remember how sternly he looked at me during those terrible days at the Parsonage? Dear, faithful Hodson! I liked him all the better for it ! He smiles on me now, and seems to think that Arthur is in safe keeping with me.....

“ What pleasant visions rise before me as I write ! George Berkeley and you at Cleveland Park with us, we with you at Berkeley Manor !

Will they be realised? And dear little Miss Walcott! Tell me what she says to the whole chapter of marriages now that the mystery of Arthur's identity is allowed to transpire. What a subject for elderly maidens' tea parties in Hulse! But never mind! We are too happy to care for that!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

I WAS going one of my usual riding expeditions in the summer-time, about seven years after that morning when Mr. and Mrs. Berkeley were reading together the announcement of Agnes Spencer's marriage to Arthur Cleveland, and as the day closed in, I came to the very same park and house which the foreign countess, the reader may perhaps remember, had visited with so much interest many years previously. But at this time the house had a cheerful, inhabited appearance ; the owner was living there ; people were hurrying backwards and forwards through the park, and there were signs of active life about the place.

Mr. Cleveland, of Cleveland Park, is a useful, active country gentleman. He has many friends and acquaintances constantly coming to visit him ;

amongst his friends are honoured names in our religious and political history; his society is sought, his advice is taken, and his sterling abilities made use of by many who have made for themselves an enduring record in our land. But his house is open not only to friends and chosen acquaintances, but also to the way-faring *poor-rich*, who may want to fill up blanks in a round of visits, and who are rejected by others on this very account, coming as they say, *just because it is convenient to them*. For this very reason, Arthur Cleveland, with the true spirit of a Christian, likes to receive them. This man was once Mr. Colville, the gloomy recluse of Hulse House, who had so much excited the fears of Mrs. Walter Crofton.

As I put up my horse at the inn, I asked some questions about him, and I was told that although Mr. Hodson was accidentally absent, I might visit Mrs. Mortimer who had been the housekeeper at Cleveland Park for many years, and who was never so happy as when talking about her master and the park. She had now retired with her husband to a comfortable looking house near the lodge gates.

I will pass over our introduction. We were soon confidentially chatting away together. Mrs. Mortimer was an excellent specimen of the decorous, reverential, grand old housekeeper of the good old times.

“ Ah !” sighed forth Martha and Jane, “ I wish there were more like her.”

“ It is a vain wish,” said I, “ but it was fortunate for me to have found even one such person in these degenerate days, and I will give you some extracts from her conversation with me about her master and mistress.”

“ You see, sir,” said Mrs. Mortimer to me, “ my dear blessed lady only died five years last January, and we cannot expect my master to be very gay and merry after such a loss ; but as Mr. Hodson says, he opens his house to all who like to come, and he does a sight of good in the country far and near, and he has company of the highest and best, and there is mostly such conversation at his table as would do any one good to listen to ; and he has company too, that may be less to his mind as to learning and cleverness, and all that, but he

will not shut his doors to any he could do a kindness to.....

Ah ! but you were asking about my dear mistress, sir ? Was not she a merry lady, and a beautiful one, and a good one too, and as clever as the greatest of the King's statesmen, I've been told. It did one good to look at her, and to see her with my master. Grave as he was, he often laughed when she was with him.

" Poor dear lady ! only about a year a bride, and she was gone, and he was alone ! I thought he would never look up again ; but he is a good man, sir, and he took his Bible to help him through his troubles ; and when Mr. and Mrs. Berkeley came to him he seemed to revive and to rouse, and so he came through ; but as I said before, he will never be what is called a merry, chattering person, nor how could I wish to see him so !

" Mr. Hodson and I, and Mrs. Hodson (that's his valet, and Mrs. Hodson is his wife, sir), we often talk of old times together, and Mr. Hodson is a man, who never left him in all his troubles, when he lived in that far-away, old gloomy house, of which I hate the very name. There

never was such a sensible, respectable man as Mr. Hodson, sir.....

“ Oh ! dear, how well I remember my dear lady, and her coming here, when I little guessed who it was ; though there was something about her, for all she spoke in a foreign tongue, that somehow drew me towards her, prophetic-like. And then, when she and my master came as bride and bridegroom, and there were we all ranged to receive them—me and the maids all in our new gowns and caps, and the men in their new liveries—and all cheering and shouting for joy, and she walked on by his side ! She was like a queen all over, as if she was proud to have such a noble husband, as indeed he was ; and then I noted through it all, and her high holding of her head, and her smiles, that there were two tears in her eyes ; and she passed her white hand very quickly across to wipe them off ; just as she did anything, always quickly ; and how her rings sparkled on her fingers ! Ah ! poor lady ! happy as she was, and never was a happier, she soon faded ; but she never gave in up to almost the last, and if my master was present, her eyes brightened up in a minute.....

"But as I was saying, she came here once for a freak times back, when my master was away, all unknown to me, or to him.

"'Mortimer,' she would say to me sometimes afterwards when she was my lady, 'how did you like the French countess? She was rather forward and impertinent, I guess. She asked a great many questions?'

"'Madam,' said I, 'she did not ask one too many for me, for I always liked speaking of my master.'

"'Well, Mortimer,' says she, with her merry laugh and cunning look, (so pretty as it was!) 'Well, Mortimer,' says she, 'I myself don't dislike speaking of him either, so there you and I agree. But I have something better than his picture to look at now, Mortimer.'

"'Yes, ma'am,' said I, 'and I am truly grateful that you have, and that he is looking a deal heartier and better than he did, ma'am.'

"'Do you think so, Mortimer?' said she, very quickly and gravely, and turning her eyes upon me to see whether I really thought so.

"'Yes, ma'am, and I wish I saw you getting as much better, too.'

"‘Oh ! nonsense, nonsense !’ she would say, turning away ; ‘never mind my looks, Mortimer.’

“But she grew thinner and thinner, and we all saw how it must be, and we contrived to get dear Mr. and Mrs. Berkeley here, knowing how they both loved them. Then if my dear mistress saw me looking sorrowful as I watched her—and I could not help doing so at times, “‘Mortimer,’ she would say, ‘I know how it is, and I grieve for him, for he will miss me terribly, but my Bible makes all easy to me, and it will do so to him.’”

And now I must close my story. Agnes Cleveland was dead, but she had been a happy wife. Arthur Cleveland was left alone, a grave, sad man, but not a gloomy one, and when he too died, at the age of forty, he was deeply regretted not by the Berkeleys and the faithful Hodson alone, but by a large neighbourhood of rich and poor, to whom he had become a useful and highly valued friend and master.

One word more, of Hulse village, and Hulse neighbourhood. Walter Crofton is justly proud of the growing fame of his brother Edward; he is happy in his new relations; he loves his good amiable sister-in-law Margaret; and George Berkeley's society is a constant pleasure to him. Mrs. Walter remains much the same.

Dear Miss Walcott is growing old and feeble, but she begs Sally to prop her up carefully whenever Mr. and Mrs. Berkeley are coming to Hulse, and her sharp, black eyes still sparkle forth their interest in seeing and hearing Rosebud and her husband as they sit with her, and she chatters on as briskly as ever, and she and George Berkeley have many friendly skirmishes of opinion to call forth her chuckling laugh, as she sits pondering over what has been said when they have left her.

Barker Preston never married, but in after times there was no such happy day for Lucy's children as when he came to visit Berkeley Manor. The large Bible still rested on its handsome stand, and the children sometimes whispered together, that though Mr. Preston was a very *joky* man, and famous for playing with them, and letting them

make more noise than any one, they knew he was a very good man, for he had given their mamma that beautiful Bible—long, long ago.

4.

THE END.



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